

# Lesley Battler | Journal | 1989





## **Journal archive project**

### **Introduction**

As a young reader i was fascinated by diaries, journals, notebooks of all kinds. Perhaps part of that attraction was that they seemed a way of telling your own story, remaking the world as you went on. “They” never have the final say in your journal.

I grew up in a family that was shattered by mental illness and writing in a journal was a discipline and a way of keeping myself together; proof I could build an independent life. I was never big on recording my most intimate feelings or expressing myself. For me, the journal existed to help me let go and move beyond the emotional, interior world. I was so much more interested in recording the flora and fauna of the mundane. Daily life was exotic to me.

From the 1980s and on into the Naughts, I wrote in a journal, which I eventually transcribed into electronic format as a project to keep me occupied during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. At first it felt like a self-indulgent pastime, certainly a little irrelevant considering world-events, but as I continued I started feeling maybe there was some value to the project. I decided to preserve them as archives, format them as PDFs and release them onto the Internet where anyone can search, download and use any of the material for projects of their own.

To me, this journal is really an archive, portrait of an era as seen by one insignificant person. It's the insignificance that is truly key here. I love the archives and records of the invisible lives that accumulate into social zeitgeists. Being a journal, it's hit-and-miss what I wrote about, or had time to write about. Huge chunks of my life never made it to the page while there may be hundreds of words devoted to a movie I enjoyed on a hot summer night. I have not added any narrative arc or changed names to keep the journal as intact as possible.

In such a long time span the journal volumes reveal a generation trying to find their way in the world; me and so many of my friends and acquaintances working contract jobs, going to community colleges to learn vocational skills. Spoiler alert: societal change, turbulence, employment issues, generational conflict were just as strong then as they are now. While transcribing the journals I also became fascinated by the rhythm of daily life, how periods of calm so often erupt into times of intense change.

I have taken the original journals and reformatted them into chronological years that begin in January and end in December, and I have included a synopsis with each one to provide a little context. I preserved as much as possible the style and quirks of the original handwritten journals and only employed some light editing to correct place names, and obvious mis-spellings.

These volumes are meant for anyone who is interested in the 1980s and 1990s, in archives, in the lives of young people trying to find a place in the world, in personal impressions of socio-economic-cultural events. This, of course, includes the introduction of the Internet to our daily lives. Please feel free to browse, reuse, recycle any of this material for your own projects. After all this time I still believe information wants to be free.

### **Vol. 9, 1989**

Grad studenting at the Stanley Pub, Blue Angel, etc – Readings, movies, lectures, plays – Jan Svankmajer – Canadian Centre of Architecture – Blue-green algae – The world of multi-level marketing – Milling around hospitals and funeral parlours – The AIDS quilt (the Names project)– I deliberately evoke and mock demons – Jazz Festival – Ray Charles – From NDG to Villeray – A fire in the depanneur down the street – Back to work after jaw surgery – Only the best liquid diet recipes – To Cape Porpoise, Maine – Doomsday prophets of the McGill Student Union – Misogynist massacre at École Polytechnique – Collapse of the Berlin Wall.

**Jan. 6**

Dismal class. Only five people present. No Graham or Ruth. I think Ruth dropped the course. Eddie seems to have vanished off the face of the earth. Saw Almodovar's *Women On the Edge of a Nervous Breakdown*, which seemed very apropos. I took it as a satire, a fun send-up of feminine clichés; sacrificing everything for love, emotionalism, high drama. Bloody tampons, virgins, bitches, haute couture. Enjoyed being able to laugh at women, at myself, outside the realm of serious criticism, analysis, social consciousness. Dreamy juxtapositions of glossy interior and exterior details, luxurious facades. A montage of women in TV commercials, cosmetics ads. A world whose inhabitants occupy gleaming penthouse apartments with seductive lighting, sparkles, sprays of light.

**Jan. 12**

Much brighter class. The return of Graham and it was lovely to see him. He gave me a New Year's kiss and he had another train story for me. The porter had spilled coffee on his shirt and gave him a whole wad of money to have it cleaned. Terry Byrnes had sent him tonight's story special delivery and it was around \$5.00. Graham paid Terry with some of the money the porter had given him, but Terry refused to take it. Graham tried to insist, but Terry simply wouldn't let him "fulfill the karma of the moment." Patty also back in town. She popped into class to greet me. Life is starting to feel good again.

I keep trying to write about Ruth but I never remember her best lines, which is the only way of recording a talk with her. She is very vulnerable, though, especially to love, concealing it under her brilliant, articulate, almost aggressive verbal skills. I think maybe her intellect developed so early that she has a lot of emotional catching up to do.

Ruth and I met after class and we went to the Stanley Pub, where all the old men go to watch hockey. She was wondering if some faculty members are gossiping about her, or are sexually interested in her. Then she told me about her lover, Nick and mulled over whether or not she would call him back tonight. She sounded very much like Val. We talked about so many amazing subjects and she made me think of Henry Miller, sitting in a bar, drinking beer after beer without appearing to be affected by it, a wealth of language, idea and spirituality. We talked about love, astrology and tai chi. She has a personal generosity and expansiveness and when she smiles this light appears from deep inside.

She said she has always felt too large and dresses in bulky sweaters and scarves. She looked like an “ingenue” the night she wore her black dress, touchingly self-conscious and vulnerable. She says I’m an “eye person,” all my energy comes out through my eyes, and that although I dress very well I dress to conceal, wearing my clothes like protective armour. We left the pub and embraced. I told her I was so happy to talk with her; she was as fabulous as I thought she’d be. I’ll also never forget Eddie calling me at Howard Ross to tell me that Ruth had said I was one of those people that made her feel happy, that made the world seem like a better place.

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Went to see *Talk Radio*. For some reason I have always been fascinated by radio, voices coming through time and space. I was fascinated by this movie much the same way as I was by Robert Stone’s *Hall of Mirrors*. This movie was reminiscent of *King of Comedy* with its alienation and barely controlled hysteria set up from the first shot. The sun sinks behind apocalyptic Dallas office towers, rush hour traffic, Barry Champlain’s disembodied voice, “This country is in trouble, people.” The camera work is disorienting and follows Champlain as he paces around the little box of his studio.

Champlain's form of talk radio is an intense, brutal psychodrama. He plays devil's advocate then contemptuously disconnects those he was attracted, all the anonymous housewives, addicts, rapists, neo Nazis. Baited by a white supremacist, he drifts into a fantasy about finding a Star of David in the dirt at Dachau and that he holds it as a talisman. The tone of his voice changes enough to make me start believing that for once he is saying something real. Then you see his hands are actually clasped around a coffee mug.

Champlain flips from one persona to another, juggling hate mail, death threats and packaged bombs. The movie is partially based on the murder of Alan Berg and there are intimations of the ending every time Champlain leaves the studio and is confronted by one of his flesh and blood listeners. "I tell you what you are," he howls into the great out-there, that void filled with the voices of hatred and strange obsession. "I have no choice, you frighten me." When Champlain is killed by a car bomb, the movie fades out, disembodied voices flutter around the radio tower like voices from outer space.

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Three hour conversation with a distraught Mary Rose. Chris, her son Eli's friend, told her he was attracted to her. She went to visit him at his house to talk with him about it. They ended up kissing and she gave him a blowjob. Then MR found out that he slept with a teenage girl (his own age) and he can't remember her name. MR is devastated and has decided, once and for all, to call everything off and forget about it. She told him to fuck off. She is trying to become "a cold bitch." Her latest fabric project was dyed in cool shades of blue, completely unlike her.

She is feeling so much right now; sexual desire, guilt, shame. She feels old and ugly. She said she's been strongly conditioned by her Catholic upbringing to feel guilt over her own sexual desires. She also told me she's had sexual relations with a lot of men (and two abortions), yet they've never brought her joy or fulfillment. Sex with Morrie is always done on his terms. She said she has never had an orgasm. She was crying as she poured all this out. I was crying too. I completely understand her feelings.

She said she loves Morrie but she loves Chris too, in an entirely different, sexual way and it's big, it's devastating, it's important. Love can split the ground under your feet and send you into the underworld. I have felt it myself now – the agony of loving two people at the same time, society making you have to choose.

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Another three hour phone conversation – Sharon this time. She was in a good mood as her insurance settlement came through and she will receive the money she hoped for. It's been a long twisted time, full of cloak-and-dagger insurance spies, lawyer double-talk, weird phone calls, etc. Sharon is teaching now and it was interesting to hear how similar teachers are to the high school students they teach, the same kind of cliques, need for conformity. She said she gets along best with her blandest colleagues because they find Sharon exotic and entertaining and laugh over her blunt speech. Ever since Marsha withdrew, Sharon has been incorporating Marsha's qualities into her own personality. I have always found it fascinating how Sharon absorbs other people and takes on their characteristics. Also fascinating how she revises history. The way she describes Elrond sounds more like the Elrond Marsha and I experienced. I remember the times Sharon sat like a black stone while Marsha and I goofed off, and the times she wouldn't go out with us because she was working, and the times she would actually yell at me for getting the same marks as her, in spite of my skipping classes and not doing nearly as much work.

She found someone to interpret the chart Jim Mills sent her in his own mysterious inimitable way. I remember Jim saying (cue up prophetic tone) that one day she might remember it and return for it. She found the interpretation perceptive and relevant. The man who read her chart talked about a block she has, that if it is ever removed, will cause her to break open. Jim told her something very similar, but now she accepted hearing this. Sometimes it takes a casual acquaintance to say something very personal.



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Saw *The Wannsee Conference* at the Saidye Bronfman Centre. Just a few good ol' German boys gathered at a conference table discussing the final solution. The board room hokes, brandy and cigars chilled me. How many times have I see then these sorts of bureaucrats and businessmen backslapping, creating avuncular atmospheres while creating policies that help prop up apartheid in South Africa and kill the environment. This film about the minutiae of genocide is frighteningly similar.

One of the film's outstanding scenes was when one of the department heads spoke out, protesting the extremism of the new proposals for dealing with "half-Jews." At first his objections were based on legalities, cold statistics and he kept repeating the party line. As he talked, he became more and more passionate, distressed. He started heading into a grey area of ambiguity and the things coming out of his mouth were actually shocking him. By the time he stated that half-Jews should be Germany's leaders you could feel a personal morality starting to break through the slogans and conditioning – like a baby pterodactyl breaking out of its egg. The longer he talked the more personal he became, sailing farther and farther from the safety of the party line. I found myself holding my breath, not only because of this extraordinary breakthrough of self-awareness but also because I feared for his life.

He was brought back to reality/insanity/psychosis by the same avuncular joking and camaraderie. He wasn't left entirely as he started though. He made a request to be removed from his department and sent to the less morally ambiguous battle on the Russian front, leaving the new policies to the younger generation, less inhibited by the facade of civilization and more extreme.

Audience discussion after the film. Many survivors thought the film was portraying the nazis in a good light, not seeing it as a dramatization of the banality of evil, or the damning indictment it really is. Professor Irwin Cotler was there and he spoke eloquently on the possibility that some of the nazis at the table thought they were taking an ethical high ground, which offended the survivors and created an angry buzz in the room. A man in the audience, who had lived in Germany at the time and had seen some of the figures in the movie dispensing "justice" in the courts, spoke out against what Cotler had said and received applause.

**Feb. 8**

My favourite McGill librarian, Wendy Patrick of Nursing Social Work, died suddenly of a brain aneurism. Went to the service held at the Wilson Hall chapel. I recognized so many people; it was like a huge family. The service was really formal. The Nursing Social Work group proceeded first, dressed all in black, followed by McLennan groups and then all the libraries in the McGill system. It was a Catholic ceremony with bagpipes. Medieval arches, stained glass, wine-red and purple banners. The priest repeated how Wendy was so young and so loved because those were the only two things he knew about her. Impressive though it was, the only thing that really seemed to reflect Wendy's personality, her liveliness, humour and egalitarianism, was "Hymn to Joy." That was appropriate and it made me cry. Ailsa was devastated. Tears were pouring down her face. She worked closest to Wendy and she's terrified of death.

**Feb. 9**

While waiting for Fred to pick me up for dinner at L'Hotellerie with Dave and Claire, I ran into Graham and we had a good talk about our class. Graham conceals some really keen observations under his easy-going manner. He said he misses Eddie's energy in the class, the way he said provocative things, or ask intrusive questions without really offending anyone. Graham described the way Ed always drew back, always qualified what he said by adding, "I didn't mean to imply -" Graham did a pitch-perfect impression of Ed's voice and intonation. Well, Graham was an actor, after all. Graham also missed Ruth tonight, the sense of danger he gets when she speaks. He thinks Terry Byrnes is very controlled, measured and that T is having trouble figuring this class out.

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Staff meeting at Howard Ross, with Bill Curran, the new head. He wants to move quickly toward automating integrating the library catalogue and circulation procedures. Had an interesting talk with Jane Jackel after the meeting and am really glad of it. I've been having problems with her dictatorial manner and have been unsure if I dislike her or simply can't work under her supervision.

The talk revealed that she understands me better than I thought she did. She said I was obviously very bright and had noticed I don't particularly like detail work. I actually consider myself "good enough," better than a lot of my co-workers, but it's not my biggest strength. She knows I'm working on my MA and flattered me by asking if I had plans for a PhD.

She said she's looking for something else, better suited to her abilities. She's also working as a proof-reader for *The McGill Reporter* now. She doesn't like being a supervisor, constantly reminding people about the details that come so easily to her. Ideally, she wishes she could say something once and that would be the end of it. We both ended up in the library field after receiving BAs in English from Queen's and not knowing what on earth to do once we graduated. I told Jane I respect people who can do the kind of detail work so effortlessly while I have to make a conscious effort to remember everything. She said detail people like herself are undervalued and I certainly agree with that. So it turns out the Jane the Martinet is someone I really like and respect. Once again – so much for first impressions. Everyone always says first impressions are always right, trust your gut instinct, etc., etc. My first impressions are almost always wrong. I must have the worst gut instinct in the world.

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Saw *Crazy Love*, a Belgian movie based on some writings by Charles Bukowski. It was mesmerizing. Gorgeous photography, ambience. Tilted horizon lines in late afternoon gold, undertone of blue-grey cloud. Always a duality of light and dark, contrast, undertone. Incredible carnival scenes, edges of light. The adolescent boy covered with boils resembled the boy in the American movie, *The Mask*. *Crazy Love* is much deeper and ambiguous, more like Hitchcock. It is all about dreams, loss, unrequited love and loneliness. A fairy-tale quality to the film; the spellbound boy, the enchanted princess, the darkness, light, yearning, the desire for an enchanted world to exist within the shell of this fallen one.

When Harry Voss passionately kisses and makes love with the beautiful young corpse, it is a tragedy, a sacrifice, an kind of selfless love born from loneliness and yearning. A very effective scene was when Harry enters the school dance with bathroom paper covering his face. The beautiful girl has one dance with him. While all this is going on, the clear-skinned plastic singer mouths imitations of American pop songs without changing expression or inflection. Piercingly ironic scene.

The scene where Harry and his friend steal the corpse is incredible and I don't think I'll ever be able to forget it. A boulevard with lamp posts, old European buildings, green-gold light, the two figures disappearing into this aquarium world. The end scene also gorgeous. Harry takes the body and walks into the water. It is dark. Everything sketched in fine point. Evoked the feeling I get when I pass through Prescott on Highway 2. The water, dark and endless, the bridge with its delicate points of light, the same kind of haunted, yearning, holy feeling. The light is gentle, dangerous, dreamy. You may enter it and never escape.

## **Feb. 16**

This Thursday I bowed out of dinner at L'Hotellerie and went to the Blue Angel with Patty and Graham instead. We had discussed Graham's story in class and he was feeling a little low, unsatisfied by the critiquing. I feel so comfortable with both of them, especially Patty. She can appear cool, a little flip, but she is loyal, sensitive, perceptive and has deep feelings, especially about her home and family in Port Alberni BC. After Graham left, Patty and I remained talking about families, politics – everything. We even talked about love, and how she was in love with a pilot who disappeared from her life. He stopped calling or writing in December or so. I can't believe she was going through the same thing at the same time. She understands exactly how I feel.

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Went to see *The Commissar* with Rita and Norman. Beautiful fluid black-and-white film. The camera never stopped moving; closeups of walls, textures of wood, stone. Very powerful scenes with children, the games of torture they played reflected the cruelty they had absorbed from the society around them. They were all part of the same poor Jewish family, yet the boys painted Stalinesque moustaches on their faces and called their sister “Jew-bitch.” No other comment or scene was necessary to convey this society. In one scene, the sister is tied to a swing. A few carefully selected images conveyed the disappearance of voice, identity. All you see are two stark black lines of the swing, the little girl tied up, whispering, “Mama, Mama” into a terrifying emptiness.

A very powerful dancing scene. Close-ups of the father dancing, utterly black background. A dance of hopelessness, of trying to affirm life when there is only a void. “Dancing into the zeitgeist.” This scene merged into a yellow newsreel vision of Jews wearing yellow stars, lined up in a pogrom, smokestack placed ominously in the distance. Some fiddlers in the line-up were an eerie inversion of the fiddlers in Chagall’s dreamy visions of shtetl life. The camera moves to the men in striped suits, already dead, the only sign of life being a kitten. This one-two punch caused the tears to flow down my face. Rita was also moved to tears by these scenes.

Rita and Norman came over for a visit after the movie and naturally we ended up in a thoroughly rousing political argument. Norman was at his most charming and expansive. He is opinionated, though, in spite of his charm. He is not afraid to admit he cries at movies, nor does he hesitate to tell stories that make him look like a shmuck. He said he has witnessed not one, but two bank robberies. During the first one he was standing in line, totally oblivious to what was going on. Someone took pictures of the event and Norman found his photo plastered all over *Allo Police* and *Photo Police* as the robber.

He criticized the Canadian government, comparing it unfavourably to the American system. He was well-informed but at times sounded cranky and disaffected. I was more comfortable with Rita’s views, her analysis. I saw a different, more vulnerable Rita today. She became passionate during Norman’s onslaught on the Canadian way, even flustered and faltering a few times.

Also found out that Norman Spatz was the man who had the four-foot high crucifix removed from City Hall court. He talked to Mayor Jean Doré about it and Doré didn't even understand what Norman's point was. Norman then wrote an eloquent letter about our multicultural society full of races and religions who do not relate to crucifixes and who would question whether or not they would receive justice from a court that so prominently displays this central symbol of a majority people. His letter was so effective the crucifix was removed! There's a piece about Norman and his mission in *The Canadian Jewish News*. A man who wears many hats – he will be giving a talk and slide show on the history of NDG at the Fraser Hickson Library. One more thing about Norman: Boris and Natasha love him, won't leave him alone and constantly try climbing to the top of his head.

## **March 2**

Went to Stanley Pub with Ruth after class. She looked tired and harried. She is working hard, teaching six classes at John Abbott College, which is out in the West Island and so much time is consumed by interminable commuting. All the rest of her time is spent with Nick. She's focusing so intensely on every aspect of their relationship, that too has become emotionally draining. She doesn't feel centered in herself. She's an Earth sign, needs time to be grounded, concrete but feels she is "on-stage" all the time at school and with Nick. She hasn't spent an hour by herself in her own apartment in the last week. To me, that sounds like a nightmare.

She's been having second thoughts about marriage to Nick. She's also depressed about our class. There's a quota of fifty pages and she's only turned in a small piece of prose, which went unappreciated by most people in the class. She doesn't know how she's going to finish. She also said she's not afraid of death but she is afraid of failure.

Ruth surprised me by telling me how good I was looking; my eyes weren't darting around and I looked rested and fit. She said she was looking around at people in the class and when she saw me, she could feel all was right with the world. I was surprised; I wasn't aware of how much Eddie had physically affected me. I also wasn't quite conscious that I have truly come out of that phase of my life, that tunnel I've been in since September.

Ruth is so precocious on an intellectual level she reminds me of a child prodigy who is especially vulnerable to love and emotion. Her intelligence intimidates me and I find myself retreating, the old fear of reaching out and approaching washes over me although I can feel her vulnerability, the part of her that has never matured because it was never allowed to be a child. At one point I apologized for my inability to express myself and defend her work in class the way it should be. She said, "You're honest, I like that a lot. Anyone who is honest is articulate." We talked about writing and I mentioned how frustrated I was about my current work and she said I was striving toward "prose art." We talked about some books that have blown us away; *Nightwood*, Anne Hébert. We got into an amusing conversation in French and English with a couple of waiters over a rubber band someone flung at her. This cheered her up and I felt some of that glow that comes right from the depths return to her. She felt it too and we embraced at the métro.

### **March 3**

Went to a *Los* reading at the Hall Building. *Los* is a literary journal produced by the Concordia English department. Patty has published in it and she read three or four of her poems. She looks small and vulnerable at the microphone. Her face is expressive and it naturally shows shyness and irony at once. She does a good job of developing a genial, even flippant, persona who can talk to anyone about anything. Her poetry is tight, succinct, assemblages made up of influences pulled from everywhere. They are also very concrete. She uses a narrative voice, often telling a story, most often about her family. Her poetry has a prose feel to it just as my prose often crosses into poetry. I thought she was among the best of the poets who read tonight.

Patty loves newspapers and she works as business assistant for *The Link*. Unfortunately for me, she has a very good chance of getting a job in Toronto as a liaison for Canadian University Newspaper Press. That's the thing I dislike most about making friends at Concordia; it's so temporary. People enter your life then leave and I end up being the only person who is still around with no one left to play with.

I also enjoyed some sound poetry by Louise McKissick. She picked two people from the audience to read her poem as a round. So powerful. The three voices took the poem far beyond the personal and turned it into an incantation. Also thought Lazer Ledenhendler was outstanding.

Anne Cimon disappointed me. She seemed affected, sentimental, an old-time anglo mooning over walks through Westmount, and how the mountain looks like a breast. I may not know much about poetry but the mountain-breast trope is old as the hills. I imagined her walking around with a dressed-up poodle. To be fair, I liked her poem in Los much better than the reading. Jennifer Boire made me realize how poetry is still set apart, falsely elevated from life. When she spoke as an emcee she was natural, speaking easily and directly to the audience. When she read her poetry her voice became high-pitched, artificial, with long unnatural pauses. The reading subverted her actual poetry, which mostly consisted of everyday images, observations. Too many people (poets!) relegate poetry to some artificial station apart from life and the voices become artificial and some times pretentious.

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Dinner at L'Hotellerie with Dave and Claire. Everything in the world is so imperfect for the great critics, Fred and Dave. They can both become so upset at minutiae; bad driving, all these everyday imperfections. I enjoy the way Claire has of teasing Dave, her sly allusions to his temper. She keeps her own passions and idiosyncrasies well concealed. She is getting Fred to help her with some computer work.

Her teacher persona dropped away when she said, "I'm a person who has to visualize. If I'm not able to do it or if it is not sitting there, then I am a stupid idiot and I don't take it in. There's nothing in my head." Then she laughed in a merry childlike way and I wanted to hug her right then and there. Claire has often played mediator, whenever one of the three of us is upset about our jobs – as so often happens.



She is full of common sense, has a great deal of understanding about people and psychology and will point out why the bosses do what they do. Fortunately, we haven't all had bad jobs at the same time. We're kind of a tag team. Right now Dave is very happy working as a museum tech at the Canadian Conservatory of Architecture (CCA). He says it's world-class in a way the McCord never was, it is managed in an efficient way and he feels important.

We all like *The Wonder Years* on TV and we talked a bit about our childhoods. Little details like Dave's mother's overcooked vegetables. Dave and Claire are both middle children. Dave is between a sister and a brother. Claire is in the middle of eight children. I think we have our love for animals in common and Claire comes alive talking about Boris and Natasha, Minette, Toby and George. They are now going to Dr Banon on our recommendation.

A large part of our friendship is based on exchange. We recommended Dr Banon, they recommended their travel agent. Fred helps them with computer work, they invite us to L'Hotellerie. Fred got Dave a job at Jérôme Le Royer and Dave got Fred into the McCord after the Ski Instructors Alliance. Trade, exchange, information, transaction. Sometimes it seems more like an amicable business arrangement.

By the way, Dr Banon is a charming young vet with a practice in St-Henri. Jane recommended him to me and she said, blushing, "he's an archetypal charming Frenchman." Jane is so cute and bashful when she blushes. Dr Banon is originally from Morocco and he even makes house calls. Since Jane doesn't have a car, he visits her and her cats. He often gets parking and speeding tickets and jokes that police just don't have the same respect for a vet as they do for regular doctors. He tried putting a sign in the back window of his car saying "Vet On Call" but it didn't work. You can tell he loves animals just by the way he handles them. He loves Natasha, calls her "Princess." I especially love it that he noticed that Boris's eyes are gold with circles of green around his pupils.

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While wandering through Cours de Montréal before class, I ran into Howard Gliserman in his man-about-town guise. He dresses for his various activities. On my way to the orthodontist yesterday I spotted him in Westmount, dressed in his “sporting togs,” tinted glasses, ski jacket. At Howard Ross he shleps around in jeans and sloppy shirt; “student mode.” Now here he is a sharp-dressing man-about-town. I enjoy meeting him like this, his wit, the way he teases me. He likes to laugh at me – but not in an unpleasant or demeaning way. We talked about Salman Rushdie and Bruce Chatwin. He’s been to bookstores around town looking for *The Songlines*, which I just purchased some five minutes ago at Prospero. He told me Chatwin died recently - “but not by order of the Ayatollah.” He commented on the absurdity of the Rushdie situation, how all religions are man-made fictions anyway. “The book [*Satanic Verses*] is a work of fiction and all religion is fiction. So where’s the problem?”

He wondered how any of the posh boutiques at Les Cours survive because they are all so expensive. Then we laughed over the “L’Egyptienne” theatre, its “pharoahnic post-mod architecture.” His parting question was, “Did you ever get paid for your published work?” I said no and he gave me a sardonic grin, which reminded me a bit too much of Eddie Singer’s.

Interesting class tonight, best of the year. My story “Tea Time Again” was up for critique and I feel I compelled Terry Byrnes to come off his lofty perch to address my work on my terms. He used words tonight I didn’t even think were part of his vocabulary; magic, enchantment, etc. For my part, I finally realized what he means when he talks about the changing narrative voice, how it breaks away from the character. He said later he was glad I had persisted in asking him – and the class – so many questions and making them give concrete answers. I feel as if I’ve cracked some sort of code.

He met with everyone individually after class to discuss our marks. He told me he was giving me an A, that my prose achieved real excellence. Then he said the narrator was too easily pulled into the childhood world, adopting its terminology and perception that should remain exclusively with the character. Tonight I understood what he meant by that.

He described my prose as being lyrical, borrowing Ruth's term, which I think she may have taken from Bachelard. He also sensed my discomfort with the form of fiction, its artificiality, the mechanics, use of devices, the he said/she said, etc. To him, fiction is always contrived, always artificial, always coercive and he is always steering students toward the consistent and concrete. I felt he made a real effort to relate to the story on its terms, to relate to me on my ground by explaining his aesthetic so clearly, using terminology I could understand. He also mentioned a duality, tension in my fiction between what is open, what is closed; the public and the private.

Went to the Blue Angel with Patty. Our class often goes overtime although Terry is acutely conscious of time and seems to measure it down to the second. Patty waits for me when her class lets out. Patty's family sounds as individualistic and independent as she is. Her sister is in law school. Neither Patty nor any of her siblings has married or has any plans to do so. Her brother is gay. She comes from a working class socialist family background and we have a common political outlook. Tonight she told me about her "funny uncle," an uncle who "touched" her and her cousins. Patty always felt shame and a sense of being different until she and her cousins started talking about it. Being able to communicate changed her feeling; it was by being able to compare and analyze that made her feel her uncle was wrong, had violated them; they were innocent children. I walked with her down Ste-Catherine and she pointed out a leather bustier she is really tempted to buy. She enjoys sexy clothes, lingerie.

### **March 10**

Went to see a play at Morrice Hall, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* with Karen and Ken (Karen Gagnon and Ken Banks). Met at the Peel Pub for cheap dinner and beer. Karen is a sessional librarian and co-worker of Fred's. Her future at McGill is as uncertain as mine, Meredith's - anyone under forty. She had just bought the new Cocteau Twins album. It's a great equal foursome. Ken is talkative, articulate, witty, working on an MA in history. He is delightful company.

The four of us are so even matched in our knowledge of current events that the lines keep coming and everyone contributes to the conversations. Often Ken and I will break off and talk about history; Karen and Fred both majored in geography. “The Ecstasy,” written by George Ryga, is the tragic story of a Native girl who left the reservation and became a prostitute in the city. The play was heartbreaking; the darkness, the Native figures standing and speaking behind a curtain, existing on the margins of society. The magistrate’s desk was elevated, the railway running along a floor of luminous colours and shapes. Voices, echoes, resonances. Disembodied voices coming from the darkness; unfigured, unsignified, unacknowledged by the settler society. Only the cliché-spouting magistrate was fully pictured, in full frame, centered in the room. Very well presented; the visual and aural completely in tune with the subject.

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A lovely passage in Ruth Taylor’s *The Drawing Board* that I like to think is the essence of Ruth herself: “In grade school she was the girl who played crooked violin and drew cracked hearts on sidewalks with stolen bits of purple and yellow chalk.”

### **March 16**

Stanley Pub with Ruth. More wedding details. She is no longer in complete control; not on her own turf and she is very anxious. She’s divided between wanting it to be natural and down-to-earth and wanting it to be dramatic and grandiose, playing it all as camp. I’d love to see her in a medieval gown with one of those cone-shaped head pieces, big billowing sleeves and lace bodice. I think that would suit her expansiveness and her powerful personality. She’s a little hurt by all the people who are so surprised by her marriage announcement. They seem to have bought the tough surface and are surprised by her insecurity and interest in a conventional ceremony.

Ruth's unconventional poetic prose pieces like *The Dragon Papers* are kaleidoscopes of language, connections, communication, full of dualities and contradictions: time/timelessness, past/future, sense of land/the purely cerebral, closed and exclusive/completely open and accessible, mythological/mundane, Platonic love/earthy sensuality. What it doesn't reveal is anything personal about Ruth except her erudition and acute critical knowledge. Maybe that's what makes the class balk. It is highly controlled, self-conscious writing; not just thinly disguised autobiography. Much of the criticism given to the stories flows into the personal. In that respect, the set-up of the class is false and hypocritical. There is a tacit agreement to avoid personal discussion, yet the criticism always centers on all the little fissures in the prose that reveal the writers' weaknesses. Ruth's voice is too large, too certain. There are no cracks, no way of siphoning an autobiography. I think this is what the class can't accept.

Ruth's most recent piece, "The Boy's Club," which she handed in only to fulfill her page requirements, is completely different from her other work. This is a recognizable story with a single narrative voice, conventional character that can be related to Ruth herself. I am so sure this will be her most popular piece.

### **March 19**

Went to Norman's slide presentation on the history of NDG at the Fraser-Hickson Library. As expected, he was a war,. Humorous, enthusiastic speaker, wearing an Alliance Québec button on his lapel. He shared the stage with Professor Van Nuys from Concordia, whose talk was more socio-economic. The audience was made up of elderly people, some community leaders and Norman's friends, who often baited him. Norman talked about how and why NDG became middle-class as compared to other areas of Montréal, and he talked with great sarcastic relish about deals struck up between the wealthy farming families and the City of Montréal. There's a reason why there's so much pleasant green space and big trees in NDG – it didn't just happen. It was planned that way to attract middle-class homeowners and exclude the urban working class.

Marcil, the last mayor of NDG as a separate municipality, was against joining Montréal, and had bylaws passed for developers to create the ideal NDG home. This was two stories, all brick with a porch, set back from the road. These laws were created as a reaction against some people who had moved to Madison Ave and erected one-storey wooden “working class” cottages. Marcil and his ilk deemed the cottages eyesores, decreed they were not the sort of people he wanted to moved to NDG, and these bylaws were put into effect to keep them out. I love the green spaces, trees and brick buildings of NDG and now it’s all mixed up with elitism, exclusivity, injustice.

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Stan Brakhage’s reading of Gertrude Stein’s poem *a rose is a rose is a rose*: “... What you got from Gertrude Stein’s three-time repetition of the word was birth, sex and death. I always rolled the poem around in my head – a rose is eros is arrows is sorrows – you can turn the wheel endlessly.” More Brakhage:

“I am involved in the study of the eye. I can’t think of any other film maker who has really dealt with how the eye works psychologically. ...

“There are so many different kinds of sight. There is even one that is a little related to the Hollywood movie; what it lacks is the jumping around of the eyes to put a scene together. Cubism was an attempt to capture in paint the qualities of seeing. Isn’t it true that things overlap each other as you see them? As my eyes dart around, the angles of your body and the way the light falls on you are completely displaced. Even when we think we are stony-eyed and staring at one spot, the eyes jump continually and the brain flickers a variety of interpretations of this one spot ...

“The problem is that most people are reading these films out of the trained experience of the normal film. So the film is making a statement to them that the person is jumping and leaping, while what I am stating is that the eyes jump and leap. This is what Gertrude Stein meant when she said that Picasso was the first painter in several hundred years to paint what he really saw.”

### **March 24-27**

To Barrie. Managed to see the Professor this time. She has separated from Ron on a trial basis. She was very genteel and discreet about it, as she is about all things. She said, “Ron and I have decided to spend a little time by ourselves for a while.” She even has a small place of her own now. She apologized profusely for not returning my last call and said something about “the crazy little world I’m in now.” Yet her voice was firm when she said, “It’s time to stand on my own two feet for a while.” In spite of all her gentility she has always been true to herself and her real feelings.

She broke off her engagement to Frank when she realized she loved Ron better, even though the two men were best friends. I know she has felt dependent, that she was losing herself in her marriage. She’s not one to pour out her feelings but once during a long phone conversation she told me how much she admired me for my integrity and being able to remain true to myself. Then she confided that sometimes she thought she was going crazy. She is working as a waitress in the Woolworth’s cafeteria, wearing the same uniform she wore as a parody last Thanksgiving weekend.

Also got in a visit with Chris Hopwood. She still lives in that lovely little house on Bayfield and has a cat who resembles Natasha. She is still troubled by dizziness, her old inner ear disturbance. She always looks so unadorned, stripped down, pure essence, her eyes blue laser beams. Straight and unflinching. Always so divided between her ideals of what she should be, reinforced by her three married sisters, her Christian background and what she is, her essential need for solitude, to be herself by herself. Her family has always seemed a curious mixture of middle-class, English with this layer of evangelical Christianity. Chris was considered rebellious for not joining the First Baptist church.

Something Chris and I share is our attachment to the past, our childhood, which is especially strong because we were next-door neighbours almost all our lives. Her parents recently moved to another smaller house and she can’t think of it as home. She understood completely when I told her how I still close my eyes when I pass the house on Highland Avenue. She also understood how upset I am that our old red brick bungalow on Bayfield was torn down and replaced by a huge monstrosity. Monument to a full wallet, empty heart.

Ended the weekend by a good visit with Sharon in Toronto.

## March 28

*Alice* by Jan Svankmajer opened like a Steven Millhauser story. The child Alice sits in her nursery surrounded by toys. The camera angle is such that Alice doesn't look larger or set apart from the toys. Just the mystery of old toys would make a wonderful film. I was impressed by the juxtaposition of innocence/cruelty, victim/victimized, the mechanisms of torture that every day objects like scissor and other tools become when Alice shrinks and they become enlarged.

Symbols of industrialized society lurk beneath the surface of this Victorian childhood. The bisque dolls wear the same dresses as Alice. Identification between Alice and the dolls is made several times throughout the film, most notable when she eats one of the cakes, grows and becomes a huge bisque doll. The dolls have adult faces, fierce eyebrows, cruel little pointed teeth.

The White Rabbit comes to life from a glass case; a vivisected animal, licking his own stuffing. His eyes are crazed beads, he clicks his teeth. When his fabric rips he pins himself together again. He constantly consults a pocket watch, seemingly all bustle and practicality, yet he bullies and is bullied by Alice. He was caught, killed and stuffed but when he comes to life he becomes cruel, acting as he was acted upon. The only spoken voice is Alice's own reading the Carroll story. Close-up of Alice's lips, the cruel little hook and constant repetition of "said the White Rab-bit.

Great combination of live-action and stop-motion photography. In stop-motion animation an object is photographed frame-by-frame, moved slightly each time to simulate real motion. One second of screen time represents 24 individual frames to produce. The tea party sequence alone translates into more than 14,000 frames.

The Rialto Theatre was the perfect place to see such a movie, Huge old theatre in red plush – the same shade as the jackets worn by the creatures in *Alice*. Old wood, gargoyles. It made me think of Tarot cards. I felt like Alice entering the theatre, becoming a puppet or doll or mechanized toy. Impression of decayed luxury, ghosts sitting in the gilt-edged balcony.



Walking downstairs to the bathroom, conscious of every creak, entering an empty room containing only a mirror and an old chair. Half-expected to spy the White Rabbit sliding out of the mirror. Or I could start crying and have the room fill with water. I would swirl around in my own tears with a plate of cakes floating toward me.

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Stanley Pub with Patty, Ruth and Mary Hagey. Ruth tried inviting Terry Byrnes but he declined firmly, saying “My wife - “ in a low, oddly ominous tone. Graham once described Mary as “looking like every school teacher you ever had” but I enjoy her sense of humour and she told some great stories tonight.

She talked about her marriage with such humour and detachment we all laughed. It’s so interesting to hear the stories behind the fiction. It’s the same story she wrote in class using a character named Cindy, told with the same perceptive detached voice, as if the events were a curious happening. Mary was pregnant and married at seventeen. The groom was an alcoholic, hung over at the ceremony. The minister was an old retired man, disillusioned, barely conscious. They were married at Mary’s parents’ house and a plane crashed outside the window during the ceremony. An auspicious start. The marriage lasted twelve years and she spoke of it with a merry detachment. Ruth asked why it lasted so long and Mary looked up with this funny expression on her face and said, “I don’t know! It wasn’t so bad. After a while I just ignored him.” (Mary is an Aquarius.)

We talked about the class. Mary isn’t an analytical critic the way Abby is. She reads and responds emotionally, not always able to articulate her feelings. I am very similar, although I have noticed that Abby wants to stay on my good side. She very often picks up on some stray observation I make. For example, I used the word “imbue” while talking about Graham’s last story. Abby picked up the word and used it ceaselessly the rest of the evening. Mary and I talked about class dynamics. She has noticed how rarely Terry asks for my opinion, and how the roles were established right from the beginning of the year and haven’t changed. “I just sit back and agree with what you say,” I admitted to Mary. “And what amazes me is how you get away with it,” said Mary.

We talked about our periods and our mothers. Ruth told us her mother ceased being a mother to her when Ruth was ten years old. Ruth had to take over being the mother to her mother. Her first period started when she was eleven years-old. All this confirms my sense of her precocity, or maturing at an early age. It also confirms my sense of her emotional vulnerability. From an early age she has had to be a pillar of strength and she dreads failure, can't bear to have anyone see her when she's not in control.

Patty, Mary and I have all been attracted to unattainable men. I mentioned how I'm attracted to men who don't notice me while the men who are attracted to me want to marry me, have children, buy me presents etc. Patty and Mary have both had the same experience. I said, "I don't know why because I don't project that image and there isn't anything in my lifestyle or conversation to indicate this is something I desire."

Mary said, "I know what it is. It's your eyes. I have exactly the same problem, it's in the eyes." (She has big friendly blue eyes.) I joked that since my eyes are brown they make people think of the earth, the farm. "That's right," said Mary. "That's it exactly." Patty guffawed. I said, "So much for Bette Davis eyes. Some people have bedroom eyes, I have down-home farm eyes."

Mary talked about her mother, how she is from such a different generation she can't imagine ever being friends with her. "I visit her but it's like spending time with any little old lady," she said.

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Talk with Gail Veli at work. I love Thursdays. Jane's not in until 1:00 and I get to talk with Gail and Louise. Gail said something so beautiful to me. We were talking about out-laws and I told her how Fred's family never accepted me. She said, "But how could they be that way – with your face. Your heart is in your eyes. I like you so much, I'm always telling Ravil how much I like you." She embraced me and I almost cried. Gail's grandmother is very sick. She's in the hospital and receives all her nourishment intravenously. She just found out that the hospital is going to release her.

Gail almost started to cry. “They can’t do that,” she said passionately. “She’ll go to live with Auntie Kay and Auntie Kay can’t look after her. I can’t stand being here, being at work when I could be looking after her. I don’t want to work. It’s all a big gyp when people have to go to work and can’t stay home to look after their children and old people. What kind of a world is this?” A little later we talked about burial vs cremation. “I want to be buried in the ground when I die,” she declared. “My body going back to earth, tree roots over me.” (Gail is a Taurus.)

### **April 6**

Last class. We ended up having a class party in spite of Terry Byrnes’s inhibiting personality. Abby brought in a bottle of red wine and a bottle of Jack Daniels. Mary brought in some baking. I knew Ruth was planning on bringing something. Abby was sure it would be something touch and masculine, Scotch or bourbon. I disagreed and bet her that Ruth would surprise her by bringing in a nice white wine. I was right, and Ruth and I shared the bottle. It was nice, nurturing, having Ruth lean over and fill my cup. Graham drank Jack Daniels and was at his most relaxed and charming. He told us train stories and talked about James Joyce. He has a surrealistic way of including details that stand out because of the particular attention to them. I always end up comparing his stories to movies. I am really not a good critic. Like Mary, I’m too eager to be taken in by a story. I want magic, I don’t want to be separated from it.

No one was in any hurry to leave and Terry lingered as well, although he was not comfortable doing so. He told us he prefers larger classes than this one. He also found it an odd class with so many auditing students who drifted in and out. We never knew who was going to stay or leave, exactly how many copies to make.

Ruth and I talked about the class later in the Stanley Pub. She is very concerned about her page quota although I was sure he'd give her an extension if she asked. He is a very kind man that way. Ruth resented the people who drifted in and out of the class, not only because some (like Robin Massey) didn't contribute anything and took up a lot of class time. Both of our opinions of Abby improved once we got past her static, all her busy defense mechanisms and insecurities. She can be a good critic and thinks for herself, not just part of the Terry Byrnes club. Besides, she did seem to like my work.

I finally met Nick and thought he was terrific. He has an inner glow, a young gentle face. I can see why Ruth is attracted to him. There's something innocent, genuine – golden about him.

#### **April 7**

Long phone conversation with Lucie. I'm trying to recall all the subjects we covered, the changes in tone; bawdiness, hilarity, poignancy, seriousness. Lucie is so busy, dedicated, a true type A personality. She says she needs a long vacation but can't take the stress of having nothing to do. She works "night shift at the crazy place," which is at Montréal General Hospital. She is very discrete, never betrays confidences. She is also highly active in union activities, has always seen herself as dedicated to making a difference to society. One of her friends gave her a Solidarity shirt, which she wears with pride. She is appalled at what goes on at administrative level of the hospital, working conditions of the nurses. A local news show did a special on psychiatric nursing conditions. No one would speak out. Finally someone agreed to be interviewed and Lucie said it only scratched the surface. She was tempted to go into the booth anonymously and speak through one of those microphones with the voice distorters and tell the whole story.

She says she's burnt out, though, and expresses it with black humour. She had to force herself through half an hour of empathy and says she would like to know people by qualities other than their hallucinations. Some of the people she works with are so deeply hurt they develop these psychoses as the only ways they have of protecting themselves. In all her years of nursing she thinks she has cured two people – meaning they no longer go into remission – but it's the most rewarding feeling in the world.

She told a nice story about Terry Mosher (editorial cartoonist Aislin). He was in group therapy with her and he used to draw cartoons. He would concentrate completely on his drawing with an almost furious intensity. He is one of her favourite people and she has cared for many well-known people. She told me the Aislin story because she knew I won't repeat it.

We talked about love, sex, affairs. I think I have finally talked out my feelings about Eddie. Lucie thinks something must have really frightened Eddie, he must have felt his life was going to change in order for him to cut off the way he did, some transformation he wasn't ready for. I think he does this a lot and it had nothing to do with me. I'm over it.

We also talked about writing. She thinks I should quit these stupid jobs and write full-time, that out of anyone she knows I'm the one who has the chance. She has faith in me, my talent. I have faith in her too. She is very talented and she has something I lack; the drive. I don't like speaking or reading in front of audiences, I don't want to teach and I didn't enjoy the publishing experience at all. I love writing but I don't want to be a "writer."

I want to see that novel about nursing she's been plotting. Unlike me she has something to say, something that is actually worth writing and reading. She's keeping a journal full of events and observations for the novel.

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Went to see *The Navigator*. A beautiful film woven from linked images. A boy, drifting clouds, a moon, fire, a cloaked figure falling, the whistling wind. The story is set in a Cumbrian village in 1348, the year the Black Plague swept across Europe. A young boy dreams the villagers must place a spire on a distant cathedral as an offering to God in order to be saved. A group of six tunnel to the other side of the earth in search of this church. They emerge in modern times and the film becomes colour like *The Wizard of Oz*.

No clichés about strangers in strange lands. Yes, the villagers must cross a highway but the modern world is not exaggerated, not portrayed as crazed energy and motion. The perils they face crossing the highway is no more, or less, threatening than tunnelling to escape the plague. It is night, the city is quiet, almost deserted and there are few encounters with people. Even the crowd that gathers at the church is restrained. The film draws gentle parallels between the worlds. The foundrymen, workers, the villagers meet and join are not dissimilar to them. They discover that the great church they seek no longer dominates the skyline. Instead, office towers, places of business ascend to the heavens.

The church they select isn't large or important. It is surrounded by skyscrapers, but they don't see it that way. To them, it is the place where miracles can happen. The church is still, the moon is in the sky and they raise the Celtic cross to the top of the spire. The film does not end with an expected feel-good conclusion. These are not underdogs achieving something against all odds to loud choruses of American applause. The villagers return to the 13<sup>th</sup> century where the boy has had a dream and the Plague dominates. Images full of stark beauty; barges carrying the dead on black water.

#### **April 14**

Went to the Yellow Door to hear Linda Ghan and some of her students read poetry and prose. I had mentioned the reading to Lucie and she pondered over calling in sick for once, taking a night off. She is so dedicated. Linda Ghan read some selections from her new book about growing up Jewish in a small town out west. Isolation, self-censorship, compromises, the whole notion of identity. Big exciting questions and new territory. Then I heard a clatter and an adorable Lucie-face peering through the crowd like a child on the stairs at Christmas. She brought a friend, Helen, a librarian who worked at Howard Ross a long time ago, before it was located in the Bronfman building. Lucie and I had made a deal that we would both read our poetry during the open mike portion of the evening. Her poetry is succinct with vivid imagery.

Mine is more like patchwork and still too long and wordy. Lucie, union champion, accustomed to speaking in front of large groups, was so nervous she trembled and read in a tiny voice. I was extremely nervous and shaky as well. But we did it and we felt so pleased with ourselves we went out for pizza and wine to celebrate.

### **April 15**

Cowboy Junkies at the Spectrum. Margo Timmins and the Junkies performed on a stage set up like an Anne Rice novel. Candles were lit and flickered in a ghostly way. A table, a rose in a long-stemmed vase which gleamed with light. Margo Timmins was dressed in a loose robe-like dress. With her high cheekbones and intimate detachment she appeared like an acolyte or priestess, her long sinuous phrasing like prayers or chants. This is very ephemeral music which depends on atmosphere and illusion. Repetition builds up, creates a sustained mood. The audience flowed along with the flickering candles, the New Orleans melancholy, the hint of vampires, death. Sometimes I like to imagine there is a phantom in the Spectrum who works the lighting – a spirit in the bell tower.

### **April 19**

Something is happening here: I don't hate this job the way I feared I would. I love Gail, her earthiness, her caring, sense of humour, her intuitive wisdom about people and love. Her struggles with her aunts over caring for her grandmother. I almost started crying while she was talking about it because what she is going through is so familiar to me; seeing things that are wrong, that make no sense and being powerless to change them. Gail hasn't lost touch with these feelings and our talks are deep, emotional, cleansing.

I like and respect Jane as well. She has one great chink in her supervisory armour; her social need. The only thing she can't rigidly control as a manager is her attraction to a good conversation. If she weren't my manager I would love to be her friend. I keep discovering interesting things about her, and quite a few parallels in our lives. She graduated from Queen's with a general BA and drifted into library work because she had no idea what else to do.

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Ran into Mary Hagey just outside the Bronfman Building. She invited me for coffee and I was delighted to go. She looked bright, happy. We talked about school and jobs. She is always changing jobs and her face lit up when she mentioned having a fantasy about being a truck-stop waitress. She has currently been a teaching assistant (composition) at Concordia. She said getting a TA position isn't as competitive as it sounds. She filled in the form without any expectations. Some students who were already selected dropped out and the position was given to her. Now she needs a "real" job. I described the McGill bureaucracy and all the people who talk about benefits and job security and can't imagine going anywhere else. Mary said she didn't understand that attitude nor does she understand how anyone could keep the same job for such a long time. "I love change!" she said and her whole face glowed, eyes becoming an electric blue. She has a major in Visual Arts; drawing, painting. Professor Sheps is always trying to entice her into Renaissance, Reformation, Shakespeare courses. "I want to take modern courses," she said.

Our class with Terry Byrnes came up. It turns out she knows him personally, has known him for about ten years, since a very early prose workshop. This is how the friendship began: Terry often gives the better stories to his wife to read and he gave her one of Mary's, which had a rural setting. Terry's wife was convinced that Mary came from rural Iowa as she did and wanted to meet her. At the next workshop, Terry Byrnes told Mary his wife thought she'd be a good friend. Mary mentioned she was moving and Terry volunteered to help her. I think I would drop dead on the spot if I ever saw Terry Byrnes in my apartment building, much less at my door to help me move.

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Interesting TV show called *Quantum Leap*. A scientist, Sam Beckett, is sent back in time to inhabit other people's bodies, taking on their identities in order to perform the one good deed he has to do to fulfill some sort of destiny. His guide is a hologram who provides him with basic information about the time, place and new identity. When he has completed this deed, he is sent to another time and place to inhabit another body.



I find this show so interesting; the blurring of identity, the non-linearity of time. In one episode he was sent to Atlanta Georgia in 1955 to take over the identity of an elderly black man. Beckett looks and feels like himself but whenever he looks in the mirror he sees an elderly black face.

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Some notes on a piece I would like to write:

- The show had gone far enough. All one saw was a medium. The hall shook like a séance table in 19<sup>th</sup> century Boston, Paris or Petrograd, where the devotees sat waiting, ready for the dead to come knocking on the doors.

- Etienne-Gaspard Robertson invented the first “fantasmagorie.” Guests were ushered into the most lugubrious of rooms, plunged for an hour into frightful and profound darkness.

- The hereafter of Acheron, among shadows.

- Optical specter shows amid ancient tombs and effigies, sepulchral theatre.

Evening spectators enter through main rooms of a convent. Single guttural candle, muffled sounds of wind and thunder fill the crypt, unearthly music emanated from an invisible glass harmonica.

- One by one, out of darkness, mysterious luminous shapes, seemingly close enough to touch, surge over the heads of the spectators.

- Paris came to resemble the Elysian fields, the Seine transformed into the river Lethe. a little phantom at the end of a dark corridor, at the top of a tortuous staircase.

- Lime ball, hydrogen and magnesium gaslight replaced candle inside apparatus.

Photographic transparencies took the place of glass slides.

- How to raise a ghost. Drawing room phantasmagoria. Strange surroundings, disorientation, powerlessness of the spectator.

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Shabbos dinner with Yak and Kay. They like us because of our acceptance of their religious observance, our eagerness to participate. They often feel that Norman mocks their observance and Rita is caught in the middle between Norman and her family. Yak and his twin brother Tommy break all the clichés about twins and lead very separate lives. Ya'acov feels Tommy uses his education against people. Y always very patiently explained the Hebrew and Yiddish terms he uses. Tommy will not do this. Y feels he is often overlooked and undervalued because he is the one who stayed behind, didn't go to college, didn't move to New York or Israel.

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CCA opening with Dave and Claire. This new structure is the Canadian Centre of Architecture, Phyllis Lambert's baby. Dave is working there as a technician and it's refreshing to hear him praise a place rather than catalogue all the faults and bad decisions. He showed us around with an air of propriety. It is interesting to hear the stories behind certain designs and exhibits. Architecture has to combine creativity with function and endurance and there are all sorts of intricate reasons behind every small decision, including where to place a structure in the first place. The thinking and statements really are fascinating and enlightening.

The CCA is beautifully designed, attention paid to the smallest details. Money hasn't been a problem the way it is at the chaotic McCord. Impression of cool spaciousness, technical feel. Everything looked useful, functional. Edges neatly bevelled, varnishes smooth, maple wood all polished, no slip-shop paint jobs. Muted shades of white and grey, light wood, subtle gradations of colour, light filtered in through ingeniously placed skylights.

## May 1

Met Mary Rose after work and went to the Peel Pub. She's restless, discontent, scattered and it took a while for us to settle somewhere. She prefers young lively places (where Eli and Chris might turn up). We did settle, however, and had a good talk over a pitcher. She still feels a strong sexual desire for Chris and can't quell her Catholic concept of guilt and sin. She and Morrie are talking a lot more, getting to know each other. She said the Chris affair has opened up their marriage and MR is openly expressing her own needs. She loves her Art Therapy courses, thinks this will be her career. It seems like a good one for her, a career where she can combine her artistic ability with her psychological acumen.

I love how MR becomes immersed in new ideas, enthusiasms. I never recommend books or movies to her. She would find fault with them just to be contrary. Yet so often she finds the books and ideas I have found and loved. *The White Goddess*, *Endless Love*, *Madness of a Seduced Woman*. These are books I also just found and ended up loving. I like people who discover things on their own, whose tastes aren't formed by one group, organization or school of thought. Another reason I don't like the writing-publishing world very much, so cliquish and divisive!

## May 5

Blue-green algae party at Carolyn Springer's place. Her apartment looks ever whiter and more ascetic than ever. She has become a promoter and distributor for Cell Tech, which markets blue-green algae products. Carolyn looked as if she has undergone a conversion, so white and clean, dressed in pastel pink. This seems to have become a mission for her.

These new age health food groups have a lot in common with evangelical christianity. And like these christian groups, the algae people had a dynamic leader, Harriet, to show the slides, provide personal testimonial, motivate and above all recruit, recruit, recruit. So ... she didn't have all her facts in a row – that wasn't the real purpose of her presence. Fred did a very good job of biting his tongue. Probably because we know Carolyn and have no desire to hurt her.

Carolyn is working so hard on herself; a whole regimen of control, discipline, abstinence, purification. She is very much like the person who has just found Christ and feels she must go out in the world to bear witness even if it goes against her nature. At one point I commented that even if I used the algae and it worked wonders I wouldn't sell it because I don't believe in selling anything to anyone. People discover what they need/want in their lives without my interference. Carolyn dropped her infinite wisdom persona and agreed with me, quite passionately, and for a moment I saw the Carolyn I knew. But then she said she used to feel exactly the same way about selling things – until the algae. Again sounding like a christian confessing to some heinous aspect of her self before finding Christ.

The similarities don't stop there. Both groups feel need for personal transformation. They use terms such as faith, temptation, backsliding, giving in. Instinctively, they gather people who play roles; dynamic leader, sensitive soul who work one-on-one on an intimate, emotional level. This is all bolstered by a raft of others who provide a chorus of personal stories and testimonials. The self-censorship is also notably similar. I told Carolyn that when I took some of the liquid brain food I thought I had felt a rush. Carolyn cut in and said very gently, very persuasively, "Maybe you didn't quite mean *rush*. Maybe it was more a feeling of *clarity*." I wondered about this need to change my words, then decided that "rush" was too earthy a word for them.

## May 12

Gail's birthday. I went to William Tell to select a cake. Ran into Howard Gliserman again. He was dressed in an elegant suit. We stopped and shmoozed, today's topic was if Howard Ross had any info on importing wine from the States – tariffs, regulations, etc. It seems Howard wants to deal in wine investments, which are (and I'll take his word on this) even more lucrative than real estate. Meeting him like this always puts me in a great good mood.

### **May 27**

Fred and I went to Barrie to visit my mother. She had a breakdown and was in the the hospital. Talked all morning with Gail and Cynthia, the new young shelver I like so much. Gail hugged and kissed me. She had tears in her eyes. I love her so much. I told her I would think of her every time I needed strength and courage. Jane was also sympathetic in her cooler, more cerebral way. She said she almost had a breakdown when her husband left her and she got professional help.

A shock seeing my mother on the hospital bed. She was so tiny, her eyes large, cheeks hollow. She looked like a frightened little animal. I ran to her, hugged and kissed her, told her I loved her. She said she loved me, “God bless you for coming” and she held my hand. I know I was able to go to her like that because of Gail. It’s Gail’s courage and compassion that gave me the strength to show how I felt without thinking of myself.

### **May 31**

Visited Lila. Her daughter is travelling across Europe. Her son is living with her and they have a “tricky relationship.” As usual she seemed to be divining information from me, questioning, probing. Somehow we got on the topic of Kathryn Waters, the Womens Studies professor who was so judgmental when I dropped her class because I had to work Wednesday nights at Howard Ross. Lila worked with her at Dawson College and wasn’t impressed, didn’t think Ms Waters was very intelligent. I certainly found her disorganized and rambling. I loved the readings but not unhappy about dropping the class.

Lila wanted very badly to go to the North West Territories on a teacher exchange program. So full of ideas and activity but self-denigrating. She talked a lot about her age, being too old. She thinks she may be too old to ever get anything published, that writing is a pipe dream for her; her work is doomed to remain inside a dresser drawer. She thinks she didn’t get the exchange position because of her age. She’s fascinated by the North, and there is something stark and wintry about her. She is also frustrated with teaching at Dawson because it has lost its spark and she feels she is doing it by rote.

We sat out on her balcony in soft dusk, leaves moving slightly, cars passing like slow-moving boats. Maybe it was a trick of the light but Lila was eerily reminding me of my mother, something about her eyes and facial bone structure. We discussed writing of course, how difficult it is for either of us to get any done. Even worse getting anything prepared or packaged for publication. Lila is rebellious. Her eyes glint with mischief. She can be sarcastic and impatient, little hooks of subversion. I found myself sitting in the shadowy light wishing I was (could be) having this deep lucid conversation with my mother. The woman I wish my mother could have been.

### June 3

Sharon's father died of cancer on Thursday. She is 31 years old and has lost both her parents and Ernie. Fred and I missed Karen and Ken's wedding to go to the funeral. We stayed with her at the house in Prescott until late Saturday night. Betty showing the strain, trying to be courageous. Sharon says she doesn't bother trying to commit suicide because it wouldn't work; she would just injure herself badly and survive. I said I wouldn't try it either because knowing my luck, the reincarnation people would turn out to be right all along and I would come back into a family even worse than my own and have to live through elementary school again. Sharon's sister Gail loved my book and wants me to write another. She says it's rare that anything is written for an adult from the child's perspective, and even rarer from a working class background. Finally, someone who gets it! I can't for the life of me understand why this is difficult for people.

It was a real legionnaire's affair and a whole contingent of Thorpes and Sharon's step-relatives stayed in the basement drinking beer. They seem to be intimidated by Sharon and quickly left the kitchen when we entered and started talking. She said they all think she's a teetotaller and have never so much as offered her a beer. The Thorpe house is so close to the St-Lawrence that when you walk down the street you feel you're going to drop off the edge of the universe. "Well," Sharon said, "we're getting really good at milling around at funerals."

## June 11

Went to the Vélodrome to see the AIDS quilt (the NAMES project which began in San Francisco but has spread to every major city – making an interesting parallel with the plague itself). The Big O (Olympic stadium) looked like a UFO, especially at night, shrouded in smoke and fog, spotlights making it look as if it is about to take off again, return to its mysterious place of origin. The Vélodrome also has that UFO feeling to it, overwhelming impression of space, lightness not quite terrestrial. Piped-in music barely audible over generator drone. A few people walking around, sense of an eerie disembodiment. Space capsule, isolation chamber.

The quilt is spread across the floor in sections. You first approach it from a distance where it flattens into a pattern, a visual field, one work, a single achievement. It's like seeing all the regions of a country from an airplane; mountains, lakes, fields, trees, all one dimension, one plane, flowing seamlessly into that one grand design. Then you gradually descend down the bleachers, moving closer, the quilt's panels asserting their own individuality. All of these squares represent an individual's life, imbued with memory and love. The single and the collective; the promise of continuity.

Initiated by the NAMES project in 1987, the quilt consisted of some 2,000 panels when it was first exhibited in front of the Capitol building in Washington. When it returns to Washington in October 1989, it will include over 12,000 panels. The choice of using a quilt as a memorial was inspired; female, nurturing and beautiful art form. It was unbelievably moving to see in bright saturated colours, spread out on the same flat space where Olympic athletes gathered, where cyclists sped around a grooved track, a testimonial to those who have died of AIDS.

I heard nothing but whirring ventilators, snatches of eerie music and occasional sobs – just like the sounds that manage to filter down through layers of sleep. Colours illuminated the spectators from the floor. Everyone's movements were reverent, ritualist, every gesture created by emotion. Every time I looked up I saw couples embracing, ushers coming around with kleenexes. Ranges of fabrics and styles of panels. Some carried letters from loved ones, personal mementoes. Serious, flowery, affectionate, sexy, stark, tough.

A range of emotion stitched into a quilt panel, embedded in warmth, softness, colour, joined and surrounded by other panels. Panels for dead men, women, fathers, sons, lovers, infants, bikers, soldiers, leathermen, a grandmother who had died from a blood transfusion.

There were markers for Montréal visitors to write their own tributes and join the collective mourning. People knelt, crouched, took their shoes off to write on the quilt. I wrote something for Dan Alchuk: “For Dan (Mr A), You were kind and humane. Your Seneca students all miss you. You always helped when we needed it. You’re right – the library world is small. Love, Lesley (Ms Battler). PS: Fred Merritt would like to send greetings – I know it.” Not what was in my heart but I couldn’t come up with better words. Then I drew a coffee cup and started crying.

## July 12

Dinner at Carlos and Pepes with Patty, who is trying to finish her thesis before October when she is moving to Toronto. Damn, another friend leaving. Needless to say it is difficult to finish a thesis on such a strict deadline. Her advisor is Robert Allen, who is a little too easy-going for her needs. She also has to take the Techniques of Fiction course with Terry Byrnes even though she’s not interested in writing fiction. There is no escape from Terry Byrnes in this program. He has agreed to a special arrangement which means she has to complete a half-term course in two months.

We talked about the AIDS quilt. Being a self-proclaimed news junkie she knew the quilt was in Montréal but was surprised to come across panels displayed in the Ogilvy windows. She also found it deeply moving and said it has “this aura about it.” She said it was interesting to see it downtown, in high-fashion store windows “where everybody, any passerby could see it.” She enjoyed watching people stop and look, their reactions.



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Evening with Karen and Ken. Dinner at Amelio's and back to their place where we watched a movie about a special effects man. Then we came to our place and we showed off Natasha's leaping ability. Fred can get this tiny cat to jump his shoulder height to get her favourite 9-Lives treats. Boris also loves the treats, but he is too dignified to jump. He'll lounge on the floor, let Natasha bring the treats to him. He'll also curl his lip so we call him Elvis. Ken found an old set of Gibbons my mother gave me and he went crazy, looking through the volumes, talking about what an important figure Gibbons is to history majors.

More digs at English majors. I hope this is just a friendly rivalry but sometimes I wonder. He said he's noticed that English majors are always self-mocking about their books and act as if they don't even know how all those books appeared on their shelves. I think in my case, it's because I get tired of people commenting about how many books I have - "you have so many/too many books." It seems history is a much more "respectable" branch of the Humanities for most people. We came to a truce and peacefully listened to the Neville Brothers *Yellow Moon*.

## June 18

Visited Mary Rose on her birthday. I gave her a pin, a moon face bordered in deep green and purple, colours I associate with her. She showed me drawings and paintings she's done for her art therapy classes, which she loves as they blend art, psychology and self-expression. One of her drawings was all in dark blues, purples; an island, a sailboat and a figure (herself) standing on a cliff edge with her arms outstretched like a scene from the movie *Paperhouse*. Mary Rose said she is accompanied by her spirit guide, who she perceives as an angel. Angels are everywhere these days.

She said she's worked out her difficult relationship with her father although I noted a flash of anger when she mentioned calling her parents in Alberta to tell them she couldn't afford to go and visit. Her father didn't sound upset and only offered some money after heavy prompting from MR. She said her father never showed her emotional warmth but she has concluded he showed his love by materially providing for his family. To me that is such a broad generational thing – I could say the same about my father – and I don't quite understand how that is a personal breakthrough but I'm happy she has made that peace.

I told her about what happened to me when I heard about my mother's hospitalization. I wandered around all that week feeling dark and oppressed, that I must have inherited the family mental illness. Finally I had had enough of this. I lay on the bed and just let the images from childhood flow into me. All the crazy I could remember. For once I didn't try to stop them and said, "Okay give me the worse. Show me everything. Bring me to my knees. So what if I break down? If it's going to happen it may as well be now. It's not the end of the world." Gloomy scenes of Highland Avenue kept coming and I mocked them. "Big deal," I said. I pictured a black head with slit eyes. "Demons!" I snorted. "Any hack can conjure up a demon. I'm not even religious and this doesn't even frighten me." It dissolved. Then all of the images dissolved and I lay there, completely intact and feeling so very cleansed.

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Beautiful day, leaves filled with light. Left work in a good mood, after a day of talking with Cynthia and Jane. Met Mary Rose on the corner. She had been looking for me at McLennan library and had given up when we found each other. Shared a pitcher at the Peel Pub. She mentioned the name of a friend from her youth in Alberta. She even mentioned doing something with this friend. This may seem like a very strange observation but it jarred me and I realized that I rarely hear her speak in anything but generalized idealism or disillusionment about her childhood. (It was so perfect; she was so happy, in touch with nature; she identifies with First Nations ...) I had never heard her mention a name from her past, nor heard her describe any little thing she had ever done with friends.

She said her parents' break-up caused her to go into shock and she couldn't participate in the world around her. I feel as if I understand her better, her abstractions. She's in the process of recovering things about herself that she's lost, "things that seem to have gone missing." It is very exciting. She has also discovered Carl Jung.

## **June 29**

We picked Marsha up at the bus terminal. She had come in from Mirabel airport after a vacation in Devon with Eileen and Sophia. She looked great, tanned, a bright smile from the bench where she was reading a whimsical English book. Full of vivid impressions, stories, traumas. Her talk is always so interesting, has so much artistry it's a gift to hear her talk about herself. Marsha is fire and water and you don't know whether you're going to get a conflagration or a deluge. She chose to stay at the apartment to sleep and we went to Karen and Ken's barbecue.

Karen was delightful. Everyone was barefoot. Met Bev who also works at the Medical library, in technical services. We drank champagne, ate hot dogs, toasted the newlyweds. Finally got to see the wedding photos; Karen sweet and free, Ken happy and proud, wearing a bowtie. It is so nice to find a McGill librarian who shares the same interests and outlook on life – and someone our age!

Ken has been working for a moving company at Dorval airport. He came in around 9:30. He's thin, wiry, not much larger than Fred and this is a back-breaking job for him. Ken is going to Queen's for grad school. Meanwhile, Karen's sessional library job at McGill was renewed, which means they'll be commuting. They were very interested in our Kingston-Montréal tales. Ken was entertaining describing his work experiences and co-workers: "I had been there for an hour and hadn't yet heard the word fuck!" He said his co-workers were very nice – racist and sexist but very nice at the same time, which makes it difficult to pass judgment or stereotype them. I wish Marsha could have met him.

We had a little wedding celebration since none of us at the bbq could attend. We toasted them with champagne and they opened our presents. Bev painted them a watercolour. They loved the coasters made out of old Medline CDs. We also gave them a wooden fish to add to their aquarium, and hoped it would get along with the other fish. He is passionate about Irish music these days and played the new Waterboys, Sinéad O'Connor and the Pogues for us.

### **June 30**

Finally got to speak with Marsha. Rush of vivid trip impressions. Brilliant entertaining talk. This was her fourth trip to England and she says “the scales have fallen off my eyes. I now see that it’s a place like any other place, a funny little isolated island full of racism, sexism.” She also realized that Eileen is 65, and she spoke of both Sophia and Eileen as “the old ladies.” Eileen has spent a life of denial, idealism, self-sacrifice. Everything to Eileen is “so wonderful. It sometimes felt in Kingston as if Marsha was a person who entered their lives to help and serve them, rather than as a friend. Guilt, judgment, atonement always show up in Marsha’s discourse, woven throughout all her tales. Reminiscent of the ripping good stories about adventurous kids in Chatterbox that are supposed to teach some kind of moral lesson. “You are not to judge me,” Marsha often says while recounting an argument, drawing herself to full height (5’9) and blustery power, complete with stern Biblical voice.

Marsha met a man on her last day at a McDonald’s, an Irishman with a kind face. They talked like old intimate friends from the moment they met. It was raining and she accepted a ride with him. He invited her to dinner and again she accepted. They exchanged addresses and she’s going to write a short story about their encounter and send it to him. We had a good talk about walking a thin line with some of our friendships with men and I was able to talk about Eddie with her for the first time.

Dear Wheezel made it on the train to Kingston. When I got home I received a surprise. Patty Archer called, her friend from Kingston couldn't make it and she had an extra ticket to the sold-out Ray Charles concert. We met at Place des Arts Métro. She looked so cool in black shirt and jacket and jungle print pants. It is so easy being with her. Her intelligence is natural, unforced. She notices everything, always knows what's going on in her community, in the country, in the world but never a know-it-all. She's just a joy to be around.

The scene around Place des Arts was amazing. The jazz festival is huge now, extending far beyond St-Denis into the entire downtown core. Jeanne-Mance was closed and a huge inflatable stage erected. The Labatt's hot air balloon lurched over Place des Arts. People of every age group and description, drums and horns, rhythm rhythm.

The concert was wonderful although Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier isn't conducive to any feeling of intimacy between performer and audience. It is a vertical, hierarchical space where all you can do is look straight ahead and down to a distant performer. The lights came on; pink, lilac, blue. Microphones winking with light, saxes and horns blazing.

Ray Charles was led on stage, a tiny man wearing his heavy black glasses like a band over his eyes, gold lamé jacket (which Patty coveted). He became blind when he was six years old after witnessing his brother's death by drowning in the tub his mother used for take-in washing. His show tonight was cleanly professional, purged of trauma. It might have been the setting that gave it a distant impersonal brilliance. But I was just thrilled to be there. He sang in a full-throated rasp, sudden swoops, falsetto shrieks, muttered asides full of mischief. He knew just when to move to the next song and when to sustain one into a near trance. *Georgia On My Mind* was outstanding.

After the concert, Patty and I made our way up the street. Free concerts still going, hundreds of people roaming the streets. On Ste-Catherine a car full of black men pulled up beside a police car. They stuck their heads out the windows, banged on the doors and roof, hooted, grunted and taunted the policemen. One young cop with a big black moustache shrugged. Patty said, "It must be really frustrating to own a muscle car in Montréal. You can only go two miles an hour down the main drag."

We ended up at the Blue Angel, which was hopping with Saturday night activity. There's something poignant about the Blue Angel when it is full of people dancing. It is not a cool, ironic place. The people here are having an honest good time with their improbable partners. An elderly waiter sat us at a table that had one woman sitting alone. At first she seemed nervous and anxious, as I would have felt at a table with strangers imposed on me.

When Patty went to the bathroom she started talking to me and I learned her name was Mary and she was from Trenton. She lived in BC for a while. I liked and admired this woman. She comes in every Saturday night to sit, have a drink or two and listen to the music, Wayne King and Dealer's Choice being a favourite. Mary said she would never go by herself to any other bar but she feels comfortable at the Blue Angel. She also told us she's a Cancer and has a seven year old daughter.

We somehow ended up on the topic of housing developments. Patty has a strong sense of community and understands how it feels to see my favourite childhood haunts disappear. Barrie, being so close to Toronto, is brutal for that. And how about those stupid obligatory triangles architects are sticking on top of the stupidest buildings?

In BC, Port Alberni is a little off the main track so Patty hasn't seen as much of her childhood haunts disappear as I have. She also sometimes feels as if she's the only one left in town when Concordia friends move away. Yet she herself is leaving for Toronto in October, to take that Canadian University Press liaison job. We found a pizza place that was open at 3:30. We were out until 5am, birds starting, sky lightening.

## July 2

To the Jazz Fest with Mary Rose and Morrie. Free concert – Montréal Jubilation Gospel Choir. Sultry night, ceaseless ebb-flow of people. Clusters around stages. Floating in and out of the world. Standing on the bleachers looking down at islands of people. The choir assembled, every member dressed in a white robe.. Both Mary Rose and I used to sing in religious choirs. We danced and clapped our hands while others politely stood and watched. The choir director exhorted people to sing and clap, “It doesn’t matter if you clap out of time – we’re used to that!” I like Mary Rose when she drops her self-righteous priggishness and lets her fun side out. We danced together and enjoyed the music. Choreography of crowds. A group would sidle past us to the fringes, only to be immediately replaced by another group. Linden Rogers was standing right behind me. She looked fit, relaxed. She enjoys working at the residence.

On our way back to Fred’s car we stopped in front of Les Foufounes Électrique. It has expanded and looks more than ever like a Victorian cabinet of curiosities; objects, animal totems, block printing from old advertisements, strange industrial gadgets, wheels, spiked instruments. A place right out of Svankmajer’s “Alice,” a closed isolated world as menacing and sinister as it is whimsical. A macabre funhouse. Childhood with a dark twist.

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Went to the big free Pat Metheny concert downtown – along with 100,000 (or so) other people. Downtown blocked off to traffic. We couldn’t get anywhere near the stage so we lay on the grass at McGill, cool and shady contrast to the sultry streets. Evening alternated between a timeless peace and something strange and subtly threatening with a wind occasionally picking up and hinting at sudden storm. I imagined office towers dissolving, floating away. The music was fine light jazz. Fluid, seamless. Metheny played for over two hours as if overflowing with music.

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Took a break from the jazz festival and watched *Eraserhead* and *Moonstruck*. Seems a little pointless to comment on the contrast between the two movies. *Eraserhead* was granular, a slow-acting hallucinogenic 25 mm black and white film.

David Lynch wrote, directed, designed the sets and oversaw the sound effects. The film took him five years to complete. Reminded me a lot of Pabst – *Joyless Street*. Henry seems to be a figure from the subconscious, acting a man's worst fears about courtship and marriage. The scene where he meets his wife's parents and they sit down to a "chicken dinner" with a father who looks like a weirdly innocent lunatic axe murderer is an eerie shadow of the conservative family dinner hour. Also hilarious is the strange, disjointed dialogue with its overtones of threat, hostility without ever making a real connection. Slow, strange, unsettling rhythm. Eerie eroticism when Henry commits adultery with the woman across the hall and the two lovers deliquesce into their bed, disappearing in fluid, leaving only her hair floating on top. A face appears like a drop of mercury from a stopper, artificial insemination, sperm banks, etc.

Sound and rhythm of deep space, abandoned objects, satellites endlessly orbiting. Breath deep – these are the eyes, ears and voice of the creator of the universe, you fools, the Little Tramp, the Great Dictator, Modern Times, Monsieur Verdoux. Industrialization. Lynch's exquisite deep dark interiors, apartment stairwells resembling desecrated Spanish churches. Cricket sound, player pianos. Segmented radiator, hissing. Doorways arched and bricked like ovens, Zyklon B. Submarine bloop-bloop-bloops. Railway tracks extending all the way to Auschwitz, blinding yet forlorn station light.

## July 6

Another sultry night at the jazz fest. Murky air dotted with popsicle pinks, oranges, lime-greens. Met Patty at Jeanne-Mance and we listened to performers pour their hearts out in free concerts. The Dominican Republic group we came to see were no exception. Smouldering combination of scat and salsa, tropical music on a tropical night. Giant flowers, lianas, branches, leaves, roots, a big big sun, glorious sound.



## July 7

Dreamy summer day in Gananoque. Sumptuous dinner in a restaurant with Marsha, John, Bill, Pat and Pat's cousin Suzette. Bill and I talked about the jazz festival, Pat Metheny concert. Talked with Pat about braces – she has them now too. When I first started going to Dr Séguin I had never heard of adult braces or jaw surgery. Not it seems as if every second person I meet these days knows someone who has had braces and/or surgery. All of them are women. Starting to wonder if I've jumped on another female bandwagon. Dieting, relationships, commitment, "Cathy," braces and broken jaws. We all saw a light summer whodunnit, *Corpse*, at a lovely little theatre right on the St Lawrence. Rocking motion of the dock. *Corpse* was notable for its wonderful set design. The stage was divided in two, a hovel on one side and a pink and grey art deco condo on the other, separated only by a divider and play of light. One side in light, the other side dark and still, yin and yang.

Marsha divided between wanting intense involvement with people and wanting to be detached, dispersed among many. Also a desire for control. She makes ambitious plans, arrangements that only appear to be spontaneous. Eventually, every relationship she enters builds to a crisis. And as always her family revolves around her. Her mother has her theology degree and can be a minister. Her minister husband supports her "in word but not deed." Marsha's youngest sister Donnalee is sleeping with a professor. Mark's relationship is on the rocks and he's seeing another woman. Martin "remains a cynical hermit." Marguerite continues "to be in thrall to her husband." Derek the lawyer married a woman much older than himself and has taken on responsibility for a young child. I recognized all of Marsha's feelings for them; hope, fear, belief, pessimism, anger, despair, pride, protectiveness – and it never ends. Phases of the moon.

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Barbecue at Marsha and John's with ubiquitous Bill, Eileen, Dave and Lorna Kaufman who were slinging quips back and forth between themselves.

Went with M and J to see *Batman*. I have always loved the world of Batman, from the comic books on down to the old campy TV show. I love this movie revamp. The alternation between light and dark that has been going on all weekend continues. The movie is weird, black, disturbing and so fascinating to me. City scenes combined futuristic towers and architecture with every dystopian vision of “Metropolis” ever imagined. No lines between good and evil, day and night, inside and outside. Every scene could have taken place in the darkest recesses of the subconscious. Cauldron of the chemical company / desecrated art museum. I found Jack Nicholson more frightening as a businessman than as the Joker. The funhouse of Wayne manor.

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Long afternoon talk with Marsha. If Ruth Taylor describes my writing as “prose art,” then Marsha is a verbal artist. We always cover the same ground; Elrond, living with Esther, Sharon, Persaud, Val, but it still sounds fresh and dramatic. When we’re talking, events that happened years ago have an immediacy as if they just occurred. Her eyes flame and liquefy within the space of a few minutes. She ruffles herself up into righteous indignation then backs away from her own outrage and waxes philosophical. Such a feeling of indulgence, talking until we’re finally filled. 3 in the afternoon and still in our pyjamas. I felt drawn in, submerged. Odd going outside into blinding sun and heat.

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Saw *1984* on video, the movie directed by Michael Redford in 1984, containing what must be Richard Burton’s last movie appearance. The end credits feature a tribute to him, which in itself is enough to give a movie an apocalyptic feeling. Sinister, darkly sumptuous, resembling Batman in so many ways. I have to confess the movie affected me more than the book ever did. One of the aspects that most impressed me was the way the movie kept to the Orwellian vision of technology, the 1948 vision of massive clunkiness, decrepitude, rooms filled with huge computer consoles, punchcards, rattling and banging electronic stations.

This reminds me that Orwell was really commenting on the year 1948. Gigantic machines coming of age in the 1970s, spitting out punch cards, plunging the country into chaos, stock market devastation, computers declaring living people dead, dead people alive, sending children and dogs to Vietnam.

Then there was the stock market crash of October 1988, caused by computers. The future is a grotty bomb-blasted “everyplace” of post world war paranoia featuring an ever-shifting succession of faceless enemies and strawmen. Winston Smith, perfectly played by John Hurt, spends his days altering the past by doctoring newspaper articles at the Ministry of Truth, a junky building full of pneumatic tubes, huge screens bearing the horrifyingly banal closeups of Big Brother. At night Smith returns to his hovel and succumbs to dreams and nightmares – dreams of a golden country where pleasure is possible, nightmares of a childhood shattered by war. Dreams segue into hallucination, ochre dreamscapes, flashbacks, flash-forwards within flashbacks, the suppleness, quick living texture of memory itself.

Memory is the subversive element, the individual crack of lightning that threatens the monolith, the unknown that has to be dulled, drugged and controlled for the State to retain its power. Big Brother rallies shot to resemble nazi gatherings in Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*. All communication is warped. It is through disembodied voices (hearty sadistic British governess voices reminding me of Thatcher) that humanity and dignity are taken away. Richard Burton, as O’Brien, breaks Winston through his mellifluous voice, the voice of Shakespeare becoming the instrument of state punishment. The infamous torture room where the final mind control occurs is called Room 101. When I first moved to Montréal and saw spiky black 101 spray-painted on walls, I thought it was a reference to Orwell instead of Loi 101. All the voices that are repressed hum in the background of the film. It’s like posters on a wall, plastered over by other posters, left to peel in the rain, yet the resonances, traces of the originals remain somehow adding their erased messages to the new.

## July 12

Much as I love this duplex on King Edward we can't live under the jackboot of Loni Gartner any more. She is actually a genuine nazi. Our neighbours, Rosemary and Steve are great, the backyard is lovely and there is little doubt that we would win at the Régie, even with Boris and Natasha.

But if we won and stayed, we said still have to deal with the Gartners and I have had enough of them. I won't go near the answering machine any more. When I come in and see the light flashing, my heart starts pounding and I press the rewind button so I don't have to hear her ranting at us.

Mr Gartner has threatened to sic a lawyer on us. "We'll find some way to kick you out," he said. I'm not surprised by his tantrums as he goes into rages any time anything goes wrong with the building. He was wanted to sell it for a long time and he can't see reason about it. Rosemary suggested that Mr G might associate the building with Mrs G's ex-husband and a life without him that she clings to. Mr G also gets stuck doing all the labour. Mrs G has also been hoarding junk in the basement. Steve, our downstairs neighbour, says he can hear them arguing down there. Mr G will bring out a whole bunch of ancient things and line them up in the driveway for the city to take away. She'll come futzing back over with her dog and put all the things back in the basement.

One day we came home from work to find a museum of appliances; wringer washing machine and refrigerator than haven't worked for a decade. Also a rack of mangy fur coats and boxes stuffed full of *Stern* magazines. We found a program for the infamous Hitler Olympics, which I snatched for posterity. Rosemary told us that Lise was her favourite tenant because Lise has some German in her background. Steve, Rosemary and we have had long talks about the building and they are both talking about pulling midnight moves. I worry most about Boris and Natasha. I feel relief whenever I come home and see their furry little faces. Fred has finally agreed to move and not continue fighting.

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Saw an apartment on rue Tillemont, somewhere in the middle of nowhere. Very busy corner of de Lorimier. An entire Tomorrowland of Transportation – buses, cars, trucks, even planes that look as if they're heading right for the windows. It's in the North East, next door to Rosemont, which means Dave and Claire are our nearest neighbours. Country-Western bar across from the apartment building. Italian and French working class. The apartment was over a dépanneur, which we could not hear the entire time we were viewing the place and connected to the neighbour only at the bathroom wall. Best of all the cats can riot to their heart's content without disturbing anyone.

It's a long narrow L-shaped 6 ½. I could have my own office with a door! It is quite elegant, new windows, freshly painted, clean. The owner, Joe Ronci was working on the place when we arrived. He was nice, compassionate, cared about his work. He told us he liked us and didn't think there'd be any problem getting the place.

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Mrs Gartner called before work(!) I told her we were moving. Later that day we heard from Joe Ronci that Mr Garner gave us a wonderful reference. We all laughed.

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Saw *Rocky and Bullwinkle* at the Rialto. Fred and I were standing in the ticket line when a man asked us if we wanted his two tickets, picking us out of the line. He won them in a radio contest for telling some jokes and he didn't have time to attend. An offer we couldn't refuse. I loved that show when I was a kid, I wanted to see Boris and Natasha's villainous namesakes one more time. Also curious as to whether the show is as witty as I remember. The lineup was full of jokester. The one-liners kept coming all around us. The Toxic Avenger came out of the theatre and tossed popcorn at us – best ever line-up for a show. I still love it; satire and mayhem, Fractured Fairy Tales, George of the Jungle, Dudley Do-Right, Boris, Natasha, Mr Peabody and Sherman.

June Foray, who voiced so many of the characters including Rocky, Natasha and Nell Fenwick, was at the Rialto in person and she talked and answered questions after the show. She was a tiny sparkling fairytale personage with a wonderful vibrant voice. Utterly charming cartoonish movie star quality to her. One woman in the audience (the theatre was packed) told Ms Foray that we Canadians call our prime minister (Mulroney) “Bullwinkle.” Without missing a beat, Foray replied, “Is he that inept?” The applause was thunderous.

### **July 18**

Met Patty and her brother after work. She is going to BC for three weeks and I’ll be stopping by her place after work to water her plants. Rosemary has also gone home to BC for a couple of weeks and we’re looking after her plants and protecting her cat Popo from Mrs Gartner. Patty is starting to look for sub-letters in preparation for her move to Toronto. Her brother Michael is in the army, which surprised me since Patty is a socialist, feminist and pacifist in the same ways I am. Strong physical resemblance between the two, with the red hair and blue eyes. Dinner with them at Carlos and Pepes and I enjoyed hearing them talk about Port Alberni.

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We are definitely moving – August 1. Went to sign the lease and met Joe’s wife, Sandra. She reminds me a lot of Kayla, warm and nurturing, trying to cope with a three-year-old boy. Her apartment was in a merry turmoil like Yak and Kay’s. We were going over the lease when our new neighbour walked in and sat down on Philip’s high chair. The scene reminded me of a TV sit-come with all these people coming and going, gathering in Sandra’s kitchen. This will be a hectic summer with moving day and my jaw surgery arriving so close together. I will be wired shut and on a liquid diet for six weeks. No summer for me!

## July 20

My one day off ruined by the Gartners and workmen who barged into Steve's apartment downstairs to tear the old radiators out. I took refuge at Mary Rose's. We went to Chinatown for food. MR actually treated me, said I had been such a good friend to her regarding Chris and her marital problems with Morrie. She seems to be more aware when she says things other people don't appreciate. She is also more concerned about being self-centered. She's seeing a therapist now, torn between wanting to leave and wanting to stay with Morrie.

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Bar-coding began today. Went in at 3:00 for my late shift. The library has been completely disrupted, fully of terminals, coding teams. It looks a lot like our apartment right now, everything packed up, ready to be moved out. That awful unsettled nomansland feeling. Wandering aimlessly among the ruins at home and now at work as well. Michael Julien wandering around in a captain's hat. Jane very tense over the disruption. Grateful to work with Gail. She was feeling lost and nervous too. She tells everyone I'm "her pet," that there's very few people in the world who she trusts and I'm one of them.

## July 30

Moving day. Of course I have regrets. It was a beautiful apartment in NDG. But I will so glad to be free of the Gartners. Sharon put it best in her last letter: "So why the move? Have they moved in the SS troops?" Dave Billeter, Karen, Ken and Ian Basso helped us. We also had the same Concordia physical plant moving team we had last time. Too everyone out for beer and pizza at Angela's after, Karen, Ken and Ian lying in the back of the car. Ken said it felt like being a kid again, lying in the back of a car, watching the buildings and streets out the rear window, a perspective on the world he hasn't seen in years. As for Ian, every time I see him I find out something new about him. Today I discovered that he's lived in a lot of places in Ontario and our paths could have crossed innumerable times.

After the move we stayed with Dave and Claire in St-Sauveur, a lovely retreat. It felt strange driving into work early in the morning from the Laurentians. I was dropped off at Métro Jean-Talon and I felt like a pioneer again, riding the Métro lines, keeping a sharp eye out for signs, stations. Jean-Talon is like an airport with a long passage, always another escalator, another corner to turn, following signs until I finally reach the track. Feels like big-time Métro travel now. I now know where most of the population comes from, moves to every day. East to west, orange line to green, the same way I will be going next week. Berri makes Lionel-Groulx station look like child's play. I feel I should be laden with suitcases when I pass through Berri.

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Last night the dépanneur down the street from our new apartment caught fire. Crackling beard of flame and smoke and all the people in the neighbourhood were lining the sidewalks, parading beside police cars, ambulances and firetrucks. A woman stood on the corner swaddled in a blanket, cradling a car. All the people from the country-western bar came striding over in their tight jeans and high heels and the little red Déménagement Elvis truck, drawing of Elvis's face on the side, hustled past all the official vehicles. And the fire calmly raged on as people came and went, groups replaced by other groups, just like the groups at the jazz festival. But the really scary thing was seeing the adjoining apartment, a little room with an insidious subtle glow just beginning to reflect on the wall. I wondered if anyone could still be in there, had just now detected the smoke, the eerie light.

### **Aug. 3**

Meredith Giffin is back at McGill, working part-time as a reference librarian at Howard Ross. She's also working part-time at Cote-St-Luc and isn't shy about describing her colleagues and working conditions there. Weird Cote-St-Luc stories, similar to the ones I heard from Johanne Cunliffe (McCreath). Meredith finds Howard Ross a pleasant environment compared to both CSL and McLennan Reference. Like me, she found the McLennan librarians very status conscious and never felt she received any respect. I'm glad she's back.



It's a different workplace with her and Cynthia here; not so dominated by the Jane-Jodie bloc. Small world of libraries: When Meredith was moving into her previous apartment she moved her things in one day early. The tenant who was moving out took a tantrum, ranted and raved at Meredith, wanted compensation for the last day's electricity, then went into a litany of complaints about the apartment and the landlord. The concierge, who was present and let Meredith in, rolled his eyes as if to say, "There she goes again."

After Meredith was fully moved in she saw the woman again at the laundromat. She was civil to Meredith. She also had a briefcase with her and was doing paper work in the laundromat. Meredith was certain she had seen that woman before, then remembered who she was. She worked at a consulting firm, TPF&C, and had spoken to Meredith's MLIS class about special libraries. Turns out that the tantrum queen was none other than Beverly Church. ("The library world is small. You'll never know who you'll meet again." – Alchuk 10:5).

Rainy day, no one wanted to leave the library. Meredith and I had both just moved and neither of us was interested in doing a slalom course around boxes. Jane, Meredith, Gail and I stayed. We were pleasantly surprised that Gail joined us. She's so devoted to her family she rarely does anything social, but her eyes twinkled when she called her son John and told him to make dinner. "I don't believe it," said Jane. "She's actually doing it." We ordered in barbecue chicken and drank sherry left over from Christmas. We talked about relationships. Jane is still trying to come to terms with being alone. I so love the blushing bashful look she gets whenever a gorgeous man comes to the desk. I mentioned how Fred and I had agreed to marry while listening to *Dark Side of the Moon* and Jane said she loved that album. She is full of surprises.

#### **Aug. 4**

Another fun Friday. Spent most of the time talking with Cynthia and Meredith. Cynthia is so great; passionate, opinionated, interested in history. Meredith is bright, thoughtful, articulate. We mocked management jargon, slushy buzzwords used to conceal very basic group psychology. It seems to me that most of the jargon has been coined by management theorists who desperately need something to publish. Another consequence of publish-or-perish. How many terms can you manufacture just to disguise simple common sense?

I've noted that almost all of the older books are straight psychology, some Freud, Clausewitz *On War*, etc. Before the 1970s there couldn't have been a very large specialized collection. I don't understand how these *Fortune* CEOs or *Harvard Business Review* pundits can possibly expound on "win-win situations" and keep a straight face. I proposed a new theory: Management by Size. Neither Cynthia nor Meredith, who are both shorter than me, went for that idea. There goes my monograph!

### **Aug. 5**

Checked into the Queen Elizabeth, the little hospital near Vendôme Métro. Besides the boredom and my general loathing of hospitals, the thing that scares me most is anesthesia – an entire part of my life happening to me without my knowledge of it. I will be lost, dead, for a day. Everyone says it's relaxing, no different from sleep, but it still scares me to think of part of my life slipping away like a subterranean river; an experience I won't be experiencing. A nurse came in, gave me forms to fill. Hours passed before anyone else entered the room. No one knew if I was getting the upper jaw broken as well. I could only hope the surgeon knew. Each form said something different and I don't know why they couldn't consolidate all these forms.

The hospital itself is like one of PD James's claustrophobic little institutions, more like a convalescent home where people could languish for the rest of their lives than a busy life-and-death hub. Nurses' station, greenish fluorescent lighting, meals appearing, disappearing. In the centre of the city yet so isolated – a self-contained world within a world. I feel so hidden.

Thanks to Fred's McGill benefits I was placed in a semi-private room. My roommate was a vivid 60 year-old Italian woman, Mrs Tellier, whose first words to me were, "Have a look at my gallstone!" She moaned and groaned, huffed and puffed, played the role of dying opera star, talked incessantly on the phone. I liked her though. She was good-hearted and down-to-earth. Best of all, she knew the hospital routine, enjoyed the attention and helped me out time and again.

Hospital is a lot like Victoria Hall. If you know what to do, are the right kind of person, you can manipulate and breeze your way through the whole thing. I, of course, had not clue. I didn't know the procedures, didn't know what questions to ask, what I needed, how to use any of the gadgets that appeared on the tray by my bed. It was Mrs Tellier who demanded lunch for me and told the nurse I was entitled to it. Jane called to see how I was doing. She has been so supportive.

Night is living hell. Lights on all night. I felt completely alone. Voices, footsteps, TV noise, Mrs Tellier's moans. The coldly lit hall reminds me of a factory. Other people's relatives pass me in the hall, look at me as at an object. Euphemisms. "Can I give you something for the pain?" Weird lighting. I open my eyes and see a head floating in mid-air, lit from below. A nurse appears to take my temperature. Faces slide silently along the passage. I am given a needle in the backside, like an assassin hired by one of the Borgias, and then I see them slipping into the darkness.

Nothing to do but watch, try to figure things out, make patterns, decode, imitate and most of all, surrender myself. I don't exist any more as an autonomous being. My aim is to conform, do what I'm told and get out of here as soon as possible. Incredible fatigue. I brought in work to do, books to read and did none of it. All I did was read old *New Yorkers* until I dozed off. Odd dream: a port opens onto a green swelling sea, low clouds running close to the surface.

### **Aug. 8-9**

Had to strip and put on a hospital tunic. Wheeled to the operating room. The last thing I remember is being wheeled into a room that reminded me of a MASH unit. In fact, that was the last thing I said to the doctor. Impression of military greys, khakis, impression of a hastily settled encampment. I laid back in a dental chair, a smiling doctor loomed over me like a shark in a tank. That was it. Woke up in my room. Fred hovered by my side. I tried writing some notes to him and the writing was tiny and cramped. It became larger as I grew more conscious. I kept asking what happened, how it went, insisting on details and falling asleep again before he could answer.

Such an internal process, the only things I could see were the swelling and the dried blood on my huge lower lip. And the elaborate grid of wiring on my teeth, the curl of the wire that fastened my jaws together keeping my teeth in their cage. Dr Ross, the head intern came into my room at 7 a.m. and told me there had been nerve damage, then left again. An hour or so later I processed the information. Damage? What?! That was the last I heard.

Syringes and slop were left on trays for me, wire-cleaning gadgets and an oxygen-water mask but no one came by to show me how to use any of these things. I was on a IV feed for the first night. The needle came out during the night and it was lucky my life hadn't depended on it as no one came in to put it back in. Hospitals are only for the young and strong!

Fred informed me that the operation had been successful, I recovered quickly and didn't have to be sent to Intensive Care. But I certainly didn't feel like myself. That's not quite right. I felt like myself but also like a different person at the same time. I was a Little Hulk with my great swollen cheeks. Most of the time was spent trying to manage the syringes to get enough to eat – at a survival level. The Little Hulk felt like a mute creature I had to tenderly care for and protect. Although she was obviously me, part of me seemed to split apart from her, watched over her, ached when she cried, when she felt ugly and alone. I still think of the Little Hulk with tenderness.

Mary Rose visited, brought me flowers she had picked herself, probably from the garden at the Westmount house where she babysits. She was fussy, distracted, irritating and I focused on the flowers as a symbol of the real MR. We went outside and talked and it seemed as if the visit went much better once we were out in open air. Unbelievable how intense the smell of grass was to me, the sensory impact of rustling leaves and natural light. While outside, she talked about how Morrie is buying an expensive hairpiece. He is convinced it will make him look younger and give him more confidence with people. I never thought I could know someone who would wear a hairpiece. MR is serious about separating from Morrie and has told Eli they are seeing a marriage counselor.

Then when we returned to the room she confided that she had always found me a bit boring; she always wished I would talk more. I am in the hospital, my jaw is wired shut, I've lost a lot of weight, I'm completely exhausted, I can't even respond to this. This seems cowardly as well as just being thoughtless – how not to visit someone in the hospital.

Not as devastated as I might have been, though. Once again astrology provides symbolism and terminology to find a more philosophical way of looking at this. Though I may be strong when it comes to integrity and authenticity, my personality is very weak. It shows in my chart – all the personal planets are muted or hobbled in some way. All of them. Moon in Capricorn, Mars in Libra, Sun-Mercury conjunct Neptune in the 12<sup>th</sup> House. Saturn in the First. Saturn has given me self-worth issues and because my personality is so recessive I continue attracting egomaniacs and blowhards into my life, people who shame me, play on my lack of self-worth. These people know my personality is my weakness, and it is something that doesn't conform or line up to what society expects it to be. I can't go out there and "Live Out Loud." What these despots don't realize is that personality isn't everything. Having a weak one is a handicap in society but it is only one small part of a person. This is who I am - I will no longer let these people dominate me, tell me who or what I should be. I have come a long way. A few years ago I would have cried my eyes out over MR's comments, grieved over another friendship that wasn't real, just convenience or predator-prey. Now I just shrug and move on. Personality and friendship are gifts like anything else. It is not the end of the world to not have these gifts; it just means having to walk a different path.

### **Aug. 11**

Big Nurse came in at 7 to make sure I was up and had breakfast and showered before being taken to the Montréal General for x-rays. This place is like a dorm or summer camp where you're expected to do things in order to fit in and be considered normal; things that have nothing to do with your actual health. Big Nurse even clapped her hands at me like some kind of demented camp counselor. Breakfast never did show up.

I was taken to the General in a Medi-Car van. I was in a wheelchair, a very strange feeling. Saw the streets go by in an entirely different way. Imagined being kidnapped, or that I was Number 6 on *The Prisoner*. My life has become so internal, passage from the hospital into the van, borne away to another hospital without even stepping foot into the outside world, all the objects and activity existing around me but not touching my secret journey.

Carried my own hospital records on my lap. I leafed through them and found everything was recorded, even the times I took a shower. Summer camp where counselors keep permanent records of your activities, social adjustments.

The surgeon's name is ... Dr Head. He looks like a surgeon, sharp, quick, no nonsense. He peered eagle-like at my face. I was then transported back to the hospital and ousted from the room by a very serious nurse who moved all my belongings into the common room. Felt like I had just been bullied at a high school lunch table. While sitting like a refugee in the common room, Gail Veli flew in, on her way to visit her grandmother. She kissed me and was amazed at how little of the surgery was visible. I loved seeing her. Call me crazy but it seems this is the way you should treat people in a hospital. I do realize I attract people who will shame me and sound my sense of inferiority (especially around personality issues). This means I so appreciate people who are actually positive and supportive.

Fred came and we stopped at Jane Jackel's apartment. She is lending me her blender. She also gave me a book, one we had talked about at work, *Solitude* by Anthony Storr. Another good person in my life. Not used to noise and speed. The Met seemed reckless and dangerous. Trucks roared by, I wanted to pant and wail like Boris and Natasha when we spirited them over to the new place on Tillemont. On the corner just in front of our place a familiar face, vivid splash of red. Patty! I cried with joy over being released from the hospital.

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Visited Patty. What a lovely friend. Not only can she understand me in person but she can figure out what I'm trying to say on the phone. Just for a short visit I had to bring a bag of syringes, liquid food and drugs. A diaper bag! No longer any freedom, mobility. I had all the stuff spread out on the floor. I was filling the syringes and it felt as if I had turned Patty's place into a shooting gallery.

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Fred and I visited Rosemary Abram at our old duplex on King-Edward. Serious problems with the Gartners. She said she's trying to be a good person and be above all the pettiness, but they are making her downright angry. Same pattern as with Fred and me. Every time the phone rings she jumps. She doesn't listen to her messages any more.

While we were there we heard a great clatter upstairs (our old now empty apartment), the sound of someone stomping around, opening closets, slamming doors. Fred, Rosemary and I cringed as if we were fugitives hiding in Rosemary's apartment. Meanwhile, outside, a green peaceful dusk.

Rosemary eventually went out to see what was going on. It was indeed Mrs Gartner, who must have seen Fred's car parked outside the place. We told Rosemary we park the car outside the place whenever we're in the neighbourhood just to enrage Mrs G. Rosemary said she had returned from BC and saw the damage the Gartners and their workmen had done. She stormed over to the Gartners' at 2 am (which was when she arrived) to find out what was going on. Apparently the Gartners had promised her they wouldn't start the work until she returned from BC. Typically, Mrs G tried to blame someone else for the damage (Fred and me) but didn't have the courage to name us. Instead she pointed the finger at "the people who were looking after your cat."

Rosemary also called the police and filed a damage report with them. She is a lovely person but she has a fierce side. She is the one who sprinkled the catnip on the Gartners' yard. My idea for revenge was to sprinkle catnip all over their yard so all the neighbourhood toms would come over, roll around and defecate on the property. It was Rosemary who carried it out – for Boris, Natasha and Popo!

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Karen Gagnon visited. She is also very good at understanding what I'm trying to say with my jaw wired shut. A great positive healthy energy. Received a letter from Mary Rose, who thinks I live too far away for her to come and visit. It hasn't stopped Patty or Karen. I suspect "being too far away" is Mary Rose code for living outside the anglo bastion.

Popped into Howard Ross to pick up my paycheque. Felt strong. Good talk with Gail and Cynthia. I sound like I've been bound and gagged. Joked with Cynthia about answering the phone, "Help! Help! I've been kidnapped and am being held prisoner here." Cynthia was wearing her little white shelving gloves and looked like a good little Catholic girl on her way to Mass. That appearance is completely deceptive. Gail calls her "Mighty Mouse" or "The Mouse Who Roars." You can hear Cynthia's high clear voice all over the library. I would love to photograph that precise delicate face, the strength and clarity of the features.

All the books are now on their shelves. All my favourite objects are now in place. There is something extreme about this apartment I quite like. My office is right on the corner of De Lorimier and Tillemont. Very busy with both traffic and people. Kids with pop guns. All manner of death crates and muscle cars trundle by. We saw the apartment during the Montréal construction holiday and now the vilest trucks pass day and night. Feel like I'm suspended in air, in the middle of it all. Yet at the same time I've made the room warm and full, an eyrie over the dangerous rush.

### **Aug. 25-27**

Weekend of visits. Pleasant evening with Karen and Ken. Why do I want to get into long philosophical discussions when I'm bound and gagged. Ken jokingly asked me to explain deconstruction to him and from there, the meaning of life. Visited the Bauers in St-Laurent. I just sat back and melted into this family's warmth and togetherness. Visit with Toni and Eric. Eric and I have been getting along quite well lately. I'm started noticing his sharp sense of humour and intuitive indirect approach to people and situations. He has taken over the business affairs of Toni Concept and Design. Toni came roaring in from a baby shower. She had her guns out a la Yosemite Sam. She hates baby showers, trying to make conversation with a group of women with whom she has nothing in common, being offered foods to which she is allergic and most of all, the stupid little rituals. She was frustrated at having to spend the entire afternoon at this function when it was a beautiful day and she had so many other things to do. I couldn't have described a baby shower any better myself!



**Aug. 30**

Another visit with Rosemary. We sat out in the backyard. It felt very nostalgic over how beautiful the yard is and how much I missed living there, but at the same time the landlord tension is so bad, we felt like a cell group of conspirators. But the great news is that Rosemary found a new place in Cote-St-Luc and is feeling happier and more at peace than she has in weeks. She said Steve is also moving out in September.

The bad feeling between Rosemary and the Gartners only escalated. Mrs G ordered her to move immediately or she would call the police. Rosemary called the police and they reassured her that landlord-tenant disputes weren't a high priority at the station. When Mrs G invited Rosemary over to talk. Rosemary thought that maybe they might reach an agreement or compromise like I had. She took her tape recorder over to the Gartners' place so she would have something to give the rental board. (Mrs G had originally consented to let Rosemary keep Popo and then reneged on the agreement the first time they had an argument.

Anyway, Mrs G became apoplectic at the sight of the recorder. It had been hidden in Rosemary's bag but in a spirit of honesty she had brought it out to show Mrs G. "Now I am really angry," Mrs G declared. She grabbed the recorder from Rosemary and threw it on the floor. She came close to going after Rosemary herself but Rosemary said, "Don't do it. Don't do something you'll regret for the rest of your life." Mrs G held herself back. The entire scene is on tape, including the sound of the machine crashing to the floor.

Although I was a little irritated with myself for being a coward and making up to Mrs G on the phone, I'm so very glad I did that now. We would have ended up in the same boat as Rosemary if we had stayed and fought. I was right – there was no way of remaining at King Edward and enjoying any kind of peaceful life. I admire Fred for getting in there and fighting the good fight, but I can't live that way. I called Mrs G, waved the white flag and we were able to break the lease and leave.

Rosemary confirmed something else I had suspected. Mrs G has a very odd perception of me. She sees me as a tragic figure, almost a sort of fairy tale figure, locked up and forbidden to speak, utterly dominated and held captive by Fred. She kept saying to Rosemary, “Poor poor Lesley ...” Part of it was the weight loss. She noticed I had lost weight but couldn’t understand it was because of the braces – it hurt to eat too much. She thought I was ill, wasting away. But we got out as quickly and painlessly as possible and I’ll take that!

It was a beautiful day and Rosemary is now out too. She can forgive the Gartners. In fact, she planted one of her tomato plants in one of Gartner’s flower boxes. Mrs G will probably rip it out in a fit of rage, but it was meant as a symbolic act, something life-affirming and regenerative. We spent the rest of the visit looking at Rosemary’s albums full of terrific photos she took in Japan and other countries where she has travelled and lived.

### **Sept. 3-5**

Karen and Ken visited; Boris and Natasha entertained. I played Robyn Hitchcock and the Egyptians for Ken. He was especially tickled by the song, “My Wife and My Dead Wife.” He is heading off to Kingston tomorrow to begin his MA in history at Queen’s. He is also going to be a TA, and will be living in the graduate residence. Karen seems cheerful – but she always does. She is a bit of a mystery to me. I like her very much but there’s something hidden about her. I don’t know what makes her angry or sad and she never talks about her job the way the three of us do. Maybe she’s just a better person than we are?

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Ran into Graham just outside McLennan Library. He wants to start a writing group. I have trouble remembering his last name is Chartier as he seems so Irish, even dressed in a tweed jacket and cap. He talks about his wife but I have no sense of her as a real person. She’s more like a character from one of his stories only without any particular qualities to make her come alive. All I know is that her name is Ethna (Etna), she’s a Dubliner and is working on a PhD in linguistics.

When he saw me, his eyes widened. He was so warm, sympathetic, so concerned. He was worried about the weight I had lost, the fact I have no family here. Yes, weight loss is a concern; it is the biggest concern for anyone undergoing this operation.

Mary Rose popped into Howard Ross. I was happy to see her and we embraced. After a while though I found her sympathy cloying and resented her using my handicap as a springboard for another litany of her own travails. I sometimes feel like a sitting duck when I'm on desk duty.

Later, I met Patty and mentioned seeing Graham. She and Graham had taken the departmental French exam together and all he could talk about was "poor poor Lesley." Patty told him she is seeing me, talking to me over the phone, I'm doing fine but he kept turning me into a tragic figure. I wonder if being wired shut, unable to talk freely is why people are seeing me as this tragic woman in a tower. I really do think it's the speechlessness that unnerves people and causes them to project this weird image on me. I find it creepy, disturbing, and it's getting under my skin. I can't wait until this weirdness is over.

### **Sept. 8**

Great talk with Gail about sex. She said she was never interested, or enjoyed it until she reached her mid-thirties. She was repressed by her mother, conditioned to believe she was "used goods" when she lost her virginity. She left her first husband, Greg, because he was unfaithful. She was isolated with her three boys in California and returned to her parents' home in Greenfield Park. She was never allowed to wear tight clothes or present an image that could even suggest sexuality. Now she's 39, she has discovered sex (with Ravil) and she said it was like "being in a dark room for so many years and having the lights come on."

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*Distant Voices, Still Lives* – Terence Davies. Impressionistic and elliptical, time travelling backward and forward like a long Proustian sentence that begins in the present, spirals inwards, punctuated by commas and parenthesis, enclosing the near past, the far distant past and finally wrapping up on the next page.

Present-past-deep past-return to present. Tonal range of browns, ghostly sea-greens, pale blues and roses, suggestive sepia photos. Recurrence of window shots. Rainy windows, frosted, misted, filmed, curtained, silhouetted figures. This family is in a constant state of siege; war inside and out (WWII). The shadows, brown scenes, fluidity, non-linear movement from memory, past and present, the state of siege are reminiscent of *1984*. Recurring tableau of doors and windows – trying to find a way inside. Lighting the same inside and out.

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*Street of Crocodiles* by the Quay Brothers. Animated puppetry à la Svankmajer with a prologue written and narrated by Laurie Anderson. More brown tones, wind sounds, muted voices. Angular weathered jointed puppet, dancing screws and nails. Dolls performing a ritual, eyes filled with light. In a shop window, details from the opposite side of the street are as clear as the objects on display. In a museum, the creatures behind glass merge with the visitor's reflection. Object and reflection a single impression. Things seen out the corner of the eye.

*The Exquisite Corpse*: a surrealist game in which first player draws a head, the second, without looking at the head, a torso, the third the legs, the fourth the feet. Bones, wood, flesh, hands, feet play against each other. *Metaphysical Playroom: a Tactile Experiment*. Playful geometric shapes, diagrams, figures from old mathematical scientific and medical texts, upbeat instructional film music. Migration of forms.

## **Sept. 22**

Wires off!!! Dr Clokie says I'm "solid as a rock." Must admit all this concern has gotten to me a little and I was very happy to hear him say that. Over the past few weeks some well-meaning people at Howard Ross have been following my progress. Professor Jorgenson has been concerned about my weight loss, but that is because his brother-in-law is getting jaw surgery. Jane likes Prof Jorgenson because he wrote a paper in which he quoted from *The Alexandria Quartet*.

He also saw me reading a Lukacs book for one of my Concordia classes when I was on the desk on my Wednesday night shift and was impressed. There is a sweet student whose friend is getting the surgery done. She's been asking me a lot of questions and was really excited for me today. The strangest question I got, however, was from a woman who leaned over the counter, really getting in my personal space and said, "Can I ask you something confidential?" "O-kaaay ..." "Did you get your jaw wired shut because you have a problem with obesity?" Everyone howled when I told the story later.

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Met Patty and her friend David McKnight at the Blue Angel. First alcoholic beverage in 6 weeks. I think they lace their wine with turpentine. David and I ended up in a deep conversation about – Harlequin romances. When Patty went to the bathroom, David said he thinks she's happy to be leaving Montréal, that she's sick of it. She's feeling good about her upcoming move. Not as traumatic as moving usually is for her.

## **Oct. 6**

Marsha, John and Ken Banks came into town from Kingston. It was the first time Ken has seen me since the wires came off so I was able to stick my tongue out at him and make cartoon voices. Marsha thinks Ken is rather lonely in Kingston; no other history grads in his residence. Ken didn't stay long at our place. He had a seminar to prepare for next week.

Seeing Karen and Ken commuting between Kingston and Montréal takes me back to the same commute Fred and I did at the beginning of our relationship. I wonder if they got married in the summer for an extra sense of security. I also wonder if our commute prompted our decision to marry. I sometimes wonder if we would have taken that step if it wasn't for the intensity of weekends together, trying to get everything in, the horrible lost wrenching feeling of parting on Sunday evenings.

M and J are spending the night at our place then the four of us are off to Cape Porpoise tomorrow. Something autumnal about Marsha that suits cool weather, long talks by a fireplace, a bottle of dry red wine. Even her hair has a russet tint like the colour of autumn leaves. John has become the more physically affectionate of the pair. He often comes up behind her to squeeze her and she pulls away, flails her arms. We feasted on Fred's lasagna. Marsha and I made a pact to not talk about work for the duration of the trip. Anyone who mentioned the "w-word" had to buy everyone a round of drinks. Much hilarity in trying to talk around work, disguising the word, inventing euphemisms.

She is in another weird work situation and her boss complex is as bad as ever. John is sick of hearing about it. He says he refuses to let anything bother him. This is a bone of contention between them. Marsha and John often snipe at each other but when Fred and I sniped at each other once, she asked if we were getting along. It's this old feeling of censorship and control. She doesn't "permit" people to reveal the same things she reveals about herself. I am sensitive to this though. People do set me apart. They do seem to expect me to be better than I am. If I express the same feelings everyone else does all the time, people will act very surprised or they censor me, or they make it more important than it was. I said something about the operation and Marsha declared, "No more about the j-word." I know I wasn't dwelling on the subject – even if I had been I think I should have been entitled. It's the only thing that's been going on in my life for the last six weeks. My emotional state is one of liberation, but one standard for everyone and a different standard for me. This friendship is too rich to feel resentment for long.

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Marsha and John are great travelling companions. John has his own precision, inner rhythm yet is accommodating and tolerant. As long as he gets his three square meals a day and doesn't have anything too exotic foisted on him, he'll be the calm center of our foursome. He also has the ability to start conversations with anyone, whether in a diner or bar. Marsha may come across as the dictator of that pair but when John doesn't want to do something he can't be persuaded. His quiet stubbornness is a good quality because Marsha often develops adversarial relationships. There is always some authority figure trying to repress and pass judgment on her and John doesn't get caught up in that.

Driving through Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. So much colour, intensity. Half-sunny, half-cloudy. Smoky sky. Trees bright wicks. White frame Congregationalist churches set among dark green fir trees. Landscape of layers, shifting as we proceed to the sea. Colours lead the eye up a distant hill then down a dark slope of forest, a slant of shadow, slivers of land containing lakes. Glimpses of the sea between trees. Everything created as we drive on, filled in, painted, coloured, animated the instant we reach it, lapsing back into shadow as soon as we pass. The Whole of the Moon by the Waterboys came on one of Marsha's mix tapes. Marsha said she loved the song and that it reminded her of me (Bat). She thought of me whenever she heard it. It's a song I love and she intuitively tapped into that.

We stayed at Red Pine Cottages in Cape Porpoise. Our cottage was lovely, cozy with a big Franklin stove and four beds. Lovely grounds with pine trees, a screen porch, a creek with a swing. Walks into town for champagne breakfasts and lobster dinners at the Captain's Table. Only a three day trip but I just wanted it to last forever.

Return trip on Sunday. Drove through deserted Old Orchard Beach just like last year. Lonely midway, machinery exposed, outlined against a tumultuous sky. I was taking pictures of some boarded up arcades and a man demanded, in a hostile tone, what I could possibly be taking pictures of. I shrugged and looked stupid until he moved on and I could get back at it.

I love the juxtaposition of colour, shape and texture of old or abandoned buildings, their imperfections, makeshift human qualities. In the middle of this cluster of hotels, arcades, souvenir shops was a little square shul adorned only with a Magen David. It too was closed for the season. Some kind of secret box, impenetrable without a key, hidden among the flimsy wide-open structures.

Walked along the ocean just like last year. One of the things I like most about Marsha is her sensitivity to mood, atmosphere, environment. The four of us kept appearing and disappearing behind the stilts of the pier. Marsha would vanish and John and Fred would appear, like figures in an intricate Lewis Carroll game in which the object is to try and identify all the figures in a frame. Passed Bush's palace in Kennebunkport. Now that he's president there are guards, security booths everywhere along the road. Opulent but spooky houses suggesting secrets, incest, madness.

All those attics, widow's walks, oddly placed windows, eccentric designs suggest people hidden away, odd repressed fantasies. The Wedding Cake House. Two long stretches of white cabanas with only numbers on the doors to distinguish one from the other. Easy to imagine Lew Archer stoically noting the sad anonymity, the barren off-season beach, prying open one of the doors and ending up facing a gun barrel, a heavily made up woman lying on the floor, a desperate petty con man, who is only a red herring figured discovered along the way to a deeper darker crime that has taken place in the past, rooted in family secrets.

Went for our annual dinner at What's Your Beef in Burlington, Vermont. A favourite place of mine because of its many bookstores. Marsha and I forgot the pact and talked about work. Chatty customs man. We laughed when he asked us where we worked: two McGill, 1 Queen's and 1 Kingston Womens' Penitentiary. A heavily institutionalized group! We had about ten bottles of booze in the trunk but he didn't care; it seemed he just wanted to chat.

Monday doldrums. Voyage over, companions leaving. Bleak bleak day. Karen and Ken arrived. Ken returning to Kingston with Marsha and John. Karen visited with us for a while. I'm pretty sure I knew how she was feeling.



## Oct. 10

I really enjoy the private think tanks of McGill. In the Student Union bathroom there is a running commentary on the pros and cons of eating meat. “I think therefore I am – a vegetarian.” Other hot issues include virginity (pros and cons of ...), love, relationships. In the McLennan Library bathroom a woman complained how in the nine months she and her boyfriend have been together she hasn’t come once, “while Romeo gets off every time.” She received a lot of advice: dump Romeo, masturbate, switch to women. Someone suggested using a lightbulb.

Sometimes you find bathroom stall political analysis: “If you voted for Mulroney you can’t shit here because your asshole belongs in Ottawa.” The pros and cons of fuel air explosives have created some controversy, and posters featuring a cartoon Peeping Tom with the caption “You May Not Be Alone” are covered in snappy one-liners. That poster is one way of always knowing you’re in a woman’s washroom – something men do not ever have to think about. Someone in the the McLennan 4<sup>th</sup> floor bathroom expressed some doubts and disillusionment with McGill in a poem, which ended with the lines, “Is it worth it to become what I want to become?”

Doomsday prophet in the Student Union: “Are you prepared for it, heathen? Repent or be caught in the Ice Age.” Another woman admonished her fellow students to “look to the mother ship for salvation,” only to be dismissed as a “wild-egoed dada propagandist.” In response to the lament, “Intelligent life on earth continues,” someone wrote. “Intelligent graffiti on McGill washrooms, the search continues.” Meanwhile back at McLennan someone had a different view: “Please stop scrubbing the stalls. This is a wimmin’s forum – a chance to exchange ideas, free of reprisal. Anonymously. Pithily. Crazily. Brilliantly. Whatever.” I too had my moment of bathroom glory. I added my two cents worth to the debate on virginity and heard a student read it out to her friend. They both laughed and I tried not to blush while washing my hands. This reaction tops any I ever received for “Polar Bear.”

Met Patty after work and gave her my bathroom graffiti notes for poetic inspiration. She was delighted and enjoyed the comments as much as I did. We had dinner at Carlos and Pepes. Went back to her place to look at some books she was discarding in preparation for her move. Depressing to all her possessions stacked on the floor. Another one gone, another place in Montréal closing up to me. Spent some time looking through her bound copies of *The Martlet*, the University of Victoria student newspaper, of which she was co-editor. Also saw some of the poetry she has published in various literary journals. So interesting to see her history, the person behind the rootless grad student in Montréal.

Patty's poetry is a collage of textures. Short lines pastiched together from her past, newspapers and TV. I admire her ability to be short and succinct. There's a lot of power in a minimal form. Her poetry also has a strong narrative pull. She tells stories, writes a lot about her family with titles such as, "Grandma Archer's Poem." Rob Allen, her MA thesis advisor, thinks she'll need to make only very few revisions; the poems are pretty much complete units.

As for her upcoming job in Toronto, she is bemused about working with kids ten years younger and she is. I must admit I associate student reporters and photographers with Fred, Queen's, a certain weird, rootless time of my life. Interesting to think of wanting to be part of that world, make a career of it – that world actually being a career for someone.

## **Oct. 12**

Dinner with Dave and Claire at L'Hotellerie. Dave always dresses up in suits and ties he finds at discount stores. Tonight he wore a shiny black tuxedo shoes he bought at a Classy sale for two dollars. He still had a dry cleaning tag on his jacket and we teased him mercilessly. He has transformed again. These days he has taken to looking and acting his age (mid-forties) in his suits and little moustache. I first met him at John Abbott College and he gave me a little bag of mushrooms. He wore a cap then, looked much younger than his age and reminded me of the Artful Dodger. I think that was my favourite of his many incarnations.

Dave would love to spend the entire dinner talking about politics. Claire can't stand politics so he only occasionally expresses his opinions. Claire always comes across as stable, calm and rational but she has a fine dry sense of humour and I detect frequent tiny power struggles between them. Dave is a funny mixture of interests, such as homeopathy, spiritualism, music, the environment and also a bedrock laissez-faire conservatism. He's the only person I know who will admit to voting for Mulroney.

He also becomes emotional very easily. The four of us were talking about the importance of environmental issues and government hypocrisy. In spite of his laissez faire beliefs Dave said that anyone who drove an unsafe car should be forced off the road. I said his proposal was all very well and good, but who gives out the permits and who enforces the law? What if the inspector doesn't like black people or is convinced that all Orientals are bad drivers? What if judgments are based entirely on the appearance of the car so that only BMWs et al are allowed on the road? And what about the socio-economic implications, people who don't have the money or mind-set to keep their vehicles well maintained? Dave's reaction was a complete knee-jerk: "I'm sick and tired of this constant fear of treading on people's toes just because they're poor or whatever. I'm sick of them using that as an excuse ..."

It was Claire who pointed out, in her patient manner, that she and I were not disagreeing with him but just point out the kinds of debates and arguments that would sway politicians. These sorts of discussions always leave me with so many questions. So much is repressed, censored and limited in this "free" society. You can drive an unsafe car, buy guns, dump garbage but you can't order certain books from L'Androgyne. When people talk about living in a free society what are they really talking about? The very people who want less government interference are always the same ones who want one defined morality. The abortion fight sums up the confusion. In the name of freedom why do they want to control society so much? There is no one more conservative than a working class person who has transformed himself and expects others to be able to do the same. Which I think is where Dave comes from.

But Dave isn't as simple as a lot of conservatives. He is passionate about environmental issues and recycling was the next topic. I said the only way to reach people about the importance of recycling is advertising; TV, radio. Most people in Québec are from backgrounds similar to mine. They don't read or have access to publications that promote or concern themselves with environmental issues. If *Le Journal de Montréal* or *Allo Police* carried advertisements promoting recycling that would reach so many more people, "les gars bien ordinaire" that need to participate to make a program successful. Those awful drug ads in the US have been extremely successful. Why can't we do something like that with a simple personal recycling program.

There are hundreds of people like me who are deeply worried and angry. Recycling is one simple way to make us feel as if we are making a difference on a tiny individual level. It's still better than feeling completely powerless. Mary Rose is trying to start a recycling program in her apartment building, just a simple separation of cans, bottles and newspapers and designating a person to be in charge of taking it to the green community bins.

### **Oct. 13**

"Link" party for Patty. She made a splash in a tight black and white vinyl mini-dress. I ended up in a group of Patty's friends from her Techniques of Fiction class (with Terry Byrnes). Good talks about writing – and the ubiquitous TB. We reminisced about the 1970s; David Cassidy, disco, eight-track tapes etc. I made everyone laugh by describing roller-skating and Bay City Roller fanatics. Alison Hughes and I had a good time talking about the Fiction class we took together, the factiousness, nastiness, the going-for-the- jugular type of criticism, the antagonism between Abby and Ruth. Alison agreed with me that Terry is prejudiced against younger writers. She recalled the first class when he passed around a blurb about a writing competition for people under 27. He said, "I guess this isn't applicable to anybody here," and Alison sat for a long time, too embarrassed to ask for the blurb until finally murmuring, "I'd like to look at it." I posed for many photos with the guest-of-honour and she told everyone I was her "Montréal life-support." I met her ex-boyfriend, the pilot, very tall and good-looking. When I left, he and Patty were having an intense conversation on the stairs.

**Oct. 14**

Patty's moving day. I stopped by to see her and it was a good thing I did because no one else had shown up to help her move. She was hung over, having partied until the wee hours. She got drunk and stoned and ended up in a huge argument with her ex-boyfriend. I was still weak and depleted from my weight loss so we were a sorry pair.

Fred arrived just in time. He helped with her futon and arranged the boxes in the truck. Had pizza at Angela's. It was dark before she was feeling well enough to leave. She sat in the driver's seat, instrument panel glowing, the world dark, oceanic. Embarkation. Fred and I both felt we should be in that truck, that familiar night drive down the 401.

**Oct. 20**

Surprise telephone call at work; a familiar seductive drawl, long and leisurely, manic and breathless all at once. Eddie Singer. He said he's been incommunicado with everyone for the past eight months and is just starting to touch base with people again. He retreated to his lovely house on the Île de Mai (that lovely drop-dead romantic night). He said he's been in therapy and managed to bring his whole family to a session. He's getting along better with his mother. I met his mother at the wedding he took me to and she resembled Val's mother, very proper and conventional and I definitely picked up the tension he was always talking about. The way his memory seizes the smallest, most arbitrary details made the conversation feel as if we were just picking up where we left off – but at the same time it felt like I was connected to a voice from the past, a long ago far away past. Very strange. He mentioned people from the class, dredged up pieces of fiction and poetry we read to each other that night on the Île de Mai.

Yet there were subtle differences. He sounded more subdued, serious about his stated resolution to respect people's boundaries. I love his psychological courage, his questions, curiosity. I told him about the lunch Graham and I had at the Sri Chimnoy vegetarian place, hanging out with Ruth and Patty, Patty moving, the operation, the Gartners, the move. He said I hadn't changed in the slightest, then added that I was a very special person. We agreed to meet for dinner at *Encore une fois* (appropriately enough). I still find something very sophisticated, urban, "New Yorkish" about our friendship.

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Went to an ASM meeting at Deena's. Great to see Deena and she was happy to see me, but I was preoccupied by hearing Eddie's voice. The intensity and urgency is gone though. His voice is no longer an addiction. I had an 8 month long cold shower, have gone through withdrawal. He still stimulates me. I want to see him but I'm not obsessed by it. It hasn't taken over my life this time.

### **Oct. 21**

Drinks and dinner with Karen and Ken. First Bodega and then Asha Indian restaurant on Parc. It's Ken's birthday tomorrow and he's going to be 31. As so often happens, Ken and I and Fred and Karen ended up in two separate conversations. Ken and I talked about grad school and vocations. He had resisted the idea of being a teacher for years but has decided that that's his true vocation and he's going as far as he can, maybe professor, maybe CEGEP instructor. Ken comes from a background where working is of the utmost importance. It was difficult to justify to his mother (and to himself) returning to school full-time. His mother was an English teacher (which may explain his attitude toward English) and she tried hard to discourage him from teaching. I wonder what the story is there. She was pushing him to be an engineer or accountant. He took an accounting course once and quit after the first class. I think he's very intense, ambitious and dedicated and I wonder what he'll be like in ten, fifteen years. My prediction: full-blown prof in a small, cloistered but prestigious university, maybe in the States.

## Oct. 26

Met Lucie after work. She wants to be a TV script-writer like Diane English, who writes for *Murphy Brown*. Lucie also loves *Roseanne*; her husband is like Dan, her daughter is like Becky and she has a DJ. She said all she lacks is a Darlene and a Jackie. She has picked up a second job as a nurse at Archambault Penitentiary!!

She says she divides her time between the pen and the bin. She's working there tonight and hopes there won't be an escape because they have to lock everyone up until head count is taken. There was a rock concert for "the boys" on St-Jean-Baptiste and someone tried to stowaway in a speaker case. Lucie said, "These are bad boys, lifers. This guy had to be gassed and washed before anyone was allowed to leave." Meanwhile at the General, Lucie's latest paranoid schizophrenic says she's hearing voices from aliens telling her they're going to stop time, so she's been setting fire to her calendars, etc.

Dinner at Carlos and Pepes with Lucie and her friend Helen, the librarian who worked at Howard Ross years ago when it was a tiny collection in Purvis Hall. She told me some Marjorie Judah stories. Apparently Marjorie Judah was a strange, mean woman. Helen is delicate and wistful. She said she hates her life and is sick and tired of being a librarian and all she does is watch movies to escape. Lucie said we're two of the people she respects most; me because I'm such a good writer, Helen because she's so intelligent and well-educated. Helen and I both respect Lucie more than anyone we know. The reasons are obvious.

Lucie told us about her meeting with Irving Layton. It was not very successful. He was patronizing and dismissive of her poetry, said it was too long. She said he treated her "like a Jewish man talking down to a shikse." Helen said he treated everyone like a shikse. Then Lucie said, "Listen to the two of you being so rational. You both want to clobber the dumb polack (Lucie is Polish) for using that word (shikse) but you won't let yourselves get angry!" I actually thought that was a great description of Irving Layton.

**Oct. 27**

ASM Halloween party at le Bleu Goanna on Parc. Cool little café, looked like a beatnik hangout, perfect setting for revelling astrologers. Axel Harvey was dressed as Moses, tablets and all, his hair and beard spray-painted white. Interesting tension between Axel and Deena/ He is such a classicist while her outlook is much more modern. Ended up in a three-way discussion with Axel and Mimi Néron as to whether astrology should be subjected to scientific inquiry. Mimi thought the two fields should be kept separate, that astrologers should not have to speak the same language as scientists.

For once, Axel and I were on the same side, both agreeing that astrology should always be challenged by scientists, by psychologists, by anyone. I went on to say that I thought every field should remain open, porous, absorb from all other fields and schools of study. I don't think this was quite what Axel had in mind. He looked a little alarmed. Had fun dancing with Janice Macdonnell. Mary Rose and Morrie arrived. I was glad to see MR but we ended up in a close "sturm-und-drang" conversation. No more dancing with Janice Macdonnell or arguments with Axel Harvey.

**Oct. 29**

Warmest birthday I can remember. Long walk around the Expo (Man and His World) islands. Reminded me of a Yugoslavian movie I saw, soft greys, browns, a few pale yellow leaves, smoky sky, clock tower in the distance. Summer heat long gone but no hint of winter cold taking its place. A lull. Abandoned Expo '67 monuments. Some, like the US pavilion, gutted by fire.

Feeling of visiting a futuristic world years in the future; the great fair, the collective activity, creation of technology, commodity, capital, the junction at which representatives of countries all over the world display their glittering wares, their visions of Utopia.



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Dinner with Dave and Claire. We talked about our memories of Expo 67. I was ten years old and being from Ontario only experienced it for an afternoon. I do remember how thrilling and futuristic the mini-rail was and entering into the magic dome of the US pavilion elevated a million miles above ground, speeding through air into this bubble containing huge movie star posters drifting like astronauts. I also remember the the rolled blue carpets of the Iran pavilion. Dave, Claire and Fred had so much more to talk about. Fred went almost every weekend via the brand new Bonaventure expressway. He remembered the passports they issued. Entry into this Babel, this Esperanto country with its own transportation system. The Expo Express. He fed fish from the bridges. He said the Mexican pavilion still had workmen chiselling away at marble and granite while scaffolding covered most of the building, but mariachi bands performed outside the pavilion. Sombreros and trumpets.

Dave remembered the Russian pavilion. Like the US, the Russians glorified technological achievements. Their pavilion was a labyrinth containing images, dioramas; a cross between a museum and a spook house. Rectangular concrete block like McLennan library building without windows. You entered, followed paths around and around, went up and down escalators without knowing where you were. Dave was 21 and he went with his first wife. They drank a lot of beer and ate German sausages. Claire teased him about going just to drink. She was sixteen and she wanted to dance!

### **Oct. 30**

k.d. lang concert with Fred and Meredith Giffin from Howard Ross; a nice threesome. It was fun seeing the poised and articulate Meredith going wild over k.d. She's a big fan and had spent the day preparing for the concert by listening to all her k.d. albums. She had even put some gel in her fuzzy Gibson Girl hair (as Gail calls it). Lineup an interesting mix of people; downtown trendies, university students, groups of real country-western fans. The group behind us talked about George Jones and Hank Williams. We stood in line for over an our and got a table front row center, the closest we've been to any performer. Meredith sat up straight, attentive, eyes shining.

It was a great concert, up there with Jane Siberry and Leonard Cohen. I love the Spectrum, its darkness with lights strung across the ceiling like stars. Jane Siberry said at one of her concerts, “It’s like standing at the end of a dock at night, watching the stars. Who would want to leave?”

Nothing prepared me for k.d.’s actual stage presence and charisma. Striking androgynous beauty in her purple suit. Reminiscent of Marsha. Her face: sly, mischievous, reverent, emotional. She flirted with the audience, opening with “Big Big Love.” Her face became closed, private for “Western Stars” and opened up again in an incredibly powerful rendition of “Crying.” She revives traditional forms with genuine emotion and reverence while adding a twist of irony, sometimes self-deprecating mockery. The way these two strains pull against each other and combine is fascinating. And it has become her original voice. It’s like postmodern writing; metafiction. She does the same thing with her dress. She exaggerates the country-western influence by including all the trappings, such as sequins, full skirts, but makes them new, fresh-collage-like. Cross-referencing, cross-breeding, boundary jumping. She is both reverent and subversive.

The songs were punctuated by her sharp, sly sense of humour. Her intro to “Big Boned Gal” was a reference to a dreadful Connie Chung interview in which k.d. was described as a “big boned gal and proud of it.” She performed a polka, which she introduced by saying, “To dance is human – to polka divine.” She also talked about how many of her songs have to do with smoking too many cigarettes, especially the Patsy Cline songs, how she herself doesn’t smoke and had to borrow a pack to use as a prop. She’s going to be 28 on Thursday (Nov. 2). Hard to believe she can be this young!

Fred, Meredith and I lingered after the last encore. The audience wouldn’t let her go. The roadies came in, opened the stage, packed the instruments into cases, wheeled trunks in and out. Band members milled around and we saw k.d. in a denim jacket standing with the guys. Prompted by super-fan Meredith, we went around to the back exit. She came out and the contrast between the public performing self and the private self was so sharp; light and shadow. Her face was closed as she signed autographs. She was brusque, eyes veiled and solemn, tolerating hugs foisted on her. We got her to sign our bus passes and our hands; bold spiky handwriting in black marker. Meredith and I said we would gladly go bisexual for her.

At work Meredith said she didn't wash her hand for a week. She went back and hung around the exit after the next day's concert and k.d. signed her t-shirt. The only other time she ever went this wild over a musician was the time she plastered herself to David Bowie's car. Her hair was cut Bowie style and he had said, "Look, she has the same hair!" I love seeing this side to Meredith and I really do like working with someone who is actually my age.

## **Nov. 2**

Met Eddie for dinner at *Encore un fois*. His driving is erratic as if bombarded by the lights and traffic of the city. He was thinner, his face more angular. Dressed in jeans, bulky sweater, scarf, not carrying a camera, not taking pictures. He wore his round clear glasses all evening so I saw his kind tired-looking eyes. I saw him with more clarity tonight. Eddie strongly resembles Lou Reed with his curly hair, dark shades, strong jaw, even the way he stands, the set of his lips, yet Eddie dislikes Lou Reed and the comparison.

Eddie talks continuously about himself but he always seems just as interested in me. He plies me with stimulating, probing questions. He led me into talking about Jim Mills, pinning me down about the fantasies we wove around each other, which ultimately ruined our friendship. I told Eddie that after a while Jim and I were only seeing the people we wanted to see, so busy pressing each other's fantasy buttons we lost sight of each other as real people.

Jim never wanted to see the side of me who loved to go dancing and drinking with Val. I never wanted to see Jim's repressed anger, his authoritarian nature, his need for an almost cruel control over others. I only wanted to see the wise counselor, the artist, poet, the avant-gardist who talked about *Tangerine Dream*, James Joyce, Monty Python, B. Kliban and of course, Tolkien (which was how we became friends in the first place). I thought I needed Jim, that those wonderful things he introduced me to would vanish without him. For his part, Jim only wanted to see me as a gentle, spiritual, mystic being he wanted to save and keep separate from the corrupt material world. Eddie said, "But you are those things."

And here we go again. Eddie and me circling around each other, teasing, flirting, skirting the edges of something deeper. Sexual attraction on my part, I honestly don't know what it is with him. I think he might tease and flirt with everyone. He has an incredible awareness, a super-consciousness. His questions are swift intuitive flashes. Any small thing is exposed under that light. He doesn't let go of the smallest detail. He has a wicked, ironic laugh. He can be scornful and sarcastic yet he denies having these traits and says he dislikes those qualities in other people. He was skewering Laurie Zack, one of our classmates, imitating his ponderous voice, his Terry Byrnes wannabe platitudes and referred to him as "Zackless Laurie." I enjoyed Eddie's parody very much, not having liked Laurie Zack, but I remember how Eddie defended Laurie last year, kept trying to convince us how nice and decent he was.

Eddie resumed his relationship with Robin Massey at about the same time he called me. He admires Robin's cool, caustic wit. Apparently she told him she had seen me a few times on the street near McGill and I hadn't spoken to her. I told him that she had looked closed, unapproachable and that she had seemed depressed and alienated in class. She told Eddie that I look like I've been through my share of suffering.

There is merciless quality to his humour and probing. When I was in love with him I pictured lightning, the earth cracking open under my feet. Self-expressing, unmasking. Exposing his own wounds and probing those of other. We talked about writing and the Terry Byrnes class as if we were both still in the class, talking about Terry's strengths and limitations. He was interested in hearing about Graham, Ruth and Patty. We stayed in the restaurant, talking, until it closed. He was trying to discover the source of Robin's comment about suffering. I have no idea what she was picking up; Robin and I weren't friends. He did enjoy Lucie's comment that I'm the "noisiest quiet person she's ever met." I can relate to that comment! I returned home, buzzing, spinning, bouncing off the walls. But not in love. Not obsessed.

### **Nov. 17**

Went to hear Ruth Taylor read at The Alley. Lots of Concordia people present, including Rob Allen with a cluster of his students. Ruth is still working on *The Dragon Papers* and it was fascinating to hear the words I had read on her class hand-outs. Mix of the familiar and the revelation. She works on one piece until it is perfected, until every phrase shines. It took her eight years to perfect *The Drawing Board*.

She has gained a lot of weight, seemed solid as a mountain. Expansion, increase, abundance, fertility. She continues to consume beer, cigarettes, everything in prodigious amounts. A Henry Miller-like appetite for the world yet with a wisdom and voice that becomes cosmic and archetypal. It's also been interesting to discover the small things that hurt her, that pierce that strong earthy exterior. Nick and a close circle of friends closed rank around her and I never got to sit down and talk with her. Could she be pregnant??

### **Nov. 23**

Saw *Echo*, directed and adapted by Robert LePage, based on *A Nun's Diary* by Ann Diamond. The set is a small cube, two walls made up of transparent screens. One wall is open to the audience. Onstage is a bed, sheets tousled as if it had just borne its inhabitants through a nightmare. Resemblance to a ship; Foucault's medieval ship of fools, plague ship not permitted to land anywhere, endlessly rejected and setting sail. Glowing eerily on a screen behind the bed, a lone bather stands on an empty beach, hypnotically dipping his hands in the waves and splashing his face.

Images appear, evocative and endlessly interpretable as cave drawings, Tarot cards, icons. LePage creates metaphors out of the physical language of the stage. This was as challenging to me as a dance performance. Candle holders become soup bowls. Nuns raise flickering light to their lips and swallow fire. The cube is a woman's dream, the diary a record of the violent subconscious world, unhappy brutal sexuality with god. Reflections, doubles, screen/mirror images. He as German soldier, she as submissive nun.

God is unable to deal with the pressure of being omnipotent. He becomes the logical projection of the Catholic vision of god, extension of the bearded old man who appears in high art, works of which are projected on the screens set up on stage. Ritual, myth. The whole play occurs on the edge, a border between stage and audience. Processions, dreams occur on the margins, circling around the frame.

### **Nov. 25**

Our centre of gravity in the city has shifted eastward. No longer in the anglo bastion of NDG, now in a working-class French-Italian area. Today was a day of enclosures. Fred and I went to a refrigerator store. Creaky wooden floor that sounded like Thunder Bridge. Lightbulb swinging from the ceiling like a late night railway station, casting shadows on the hundreds of fridges and stoves silently lined up. I walked among these still white boxes, crypts, coffins, recalling stories about small children creeping into the sealed containers. Large hairy men in the back office, speaking a very nasal Joul. I expected to see yellowed ledgers, visors, race track forms and bail bondsmen.

Right next door an aquarium store. More sealed tanks, only these were filled with water. Underwater blue light, hum, moan and gurgle of tanks. Beautiful racing-striped fish glimmering into waving plants, castles, logs; all the little theatre stages. The plant-animals are rooted but mobile, attached to rocks but completely aware, nerve-alert. They seem still but are planning strategy, setting food traps, regenerating, reproducing. I would love to peer into a tank and suddenly see a branch appear, a cell split, a new life brought into being right at that moment.

Entire gallery of aquariums like hundreds of peaceful TV screens all showing a different picture. Frames of a film, passing from one to another; all the tanks making up a continuous film strip. I love aquariums and greenhouses, the dim lighting, sense of the subconscious, a hot-house for dreams. Distillation, removal of trivial stimuli, a world of silent motion, blooming life.

On the way home we passed the Chinese Society's office. It is a still-life of squares, rectangles, planes of black and red. Impregnable. The street surrounds it like a moat. Black statue of a Chinese man stands in front. An enigmatic figure, dramatically spotlit. A sage? A philosopher? The play of light and shadow on this arrangement made it look like a stage and I imagined brilliantly costumed players appearing, epic struggles performed. Tonight a thin layer of snow coated his head. He looked snow-bound and I wondered what words he would utter, what gestures he would make when the spell was broken.

Another enclosure: the National Monument, part of the National Theatre School on St-Laurent, where we went to see a free play performed by the students, *Cloud Nine*. Rambling old building where every floorboard creaked, cold air slipping through the cracks. Much like the Rialto, only with its own shadowy atmosphere and mysteries. Acoustics incredible. Voices resonated, boomed, tolled through stairs and corridors. Rows of wooden chairs. Gilt-edged stage. In the phantom orchestra pit, a cello plays low, a sad swelling, deep underworld power. Tinkle of piano trying to break free but always succumbing to the strength of the bass. Half-light lends itself to conspiracy. Every detail on stage becomes isolated, devotional.

At intermission, Fred and I explored the building. A corridor of great wooden doors right from the authoritarian academy of *Dead Poet's Society*. Up a few flights of stairs we ventured into a huge workroom. Night, no one around, it became a "mysterium." Props stood in shadow like archeological treasures. Oriental characters were painted on the walls. Names painted on the floorboards like cave drawings, a population census of a past civilization. Fred was as fascinated by the workroom as I was. He did a Bronowski impression. (It's Ken Banks who does the best Bronowski impression.) Meanwhile, I could hear the voices of people mingling downstairs through the floorboards. Distant voices, echoes, mingling of past and present inhabitants, civilizations, time periods.

The play itself was interesting, especially the first act, which was a parody of British colonialism in Africa showing the brutality that lurked underneath the appearance of ineptitude and effete eccentricity. Insularity, inbreeding, desperate clinging to an unsustainable Empire. They also showed the similarity between the way the white colonizers treated women, the African servant and the children. The baby, Victoria, was actually a large doll, trotted out for picnics and other special occasions. Playful way of moving props, raising and lowering of trees, suns constantly plunked down in front of the British.

### **Nov. 30**

Patty arrived at 10:30. She's spending the weekend in Montréal, staying at our place. We spent the rest of the night looking at her photos of the farewell party and some of a conference she attended in Calgary.

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Howard Ross was short-staffed again (only Jane and me), one of those irritatingly busy Fridays, and freezing cold, much more like January than December 1 and I was wrapped in my black cape-coat. Patty was meeting Terry Byrnes re graduation requirements. I rushed down to the Norris Building at lunch to try and get my own registration problems straightened out. Patty and Terry were still conferring when I showed up. I must have appeared like the pantomime Northern Wind, red-cheeked and breathless, storming around in my high black boots.

It was Terry who noticed me and called me into his office. He said as far as he's concerned I'll have no problem taking his required Techniques course in January. The meeting turned into a conversation between Patty and me with Terry Byrnes becoming a bewildered observer.



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Met Patty at *The Link* (Concordia student newspaper) after work. I got to hear a meeting in progress, a critique of the paper's latest issue; spelling mistakes, letters received. Everyone was excited because *The Link* is receiving more letters these days. We ate at Amelio's and went to our old haunt, The Blue Angel. We had a great time. Patty showed me two of her most recent poems, one based on a letter written to her by her father. It was shaped as a poem but kept his grammar, expressions and voice, and his attempts to reach out and express himself were poignant. That voice would have been lost if she had overwritten it with an outside "poetic narrative" voice.

We talked about writing. Patty told me what Terry Byrnes had thought of John Updike's reading at McGill. It had been a polished reading as expected, but Terry had been disturbed by Updike's ignorance and patronizing attitude toward Canada. He was also disturbed by the audience's acceptance of Updike's view. During an inept description of Toronto the audience kept laughing and going along with it. I can't stand John Updike and missed this reading. C'est la vie! As usual we had a great time watching the Blue Angel regulars mingling and pairing up into the most unlikely couples imaginable, making their way to the dance floor.

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Another cold blustery day. Fred's car broke down at Harvey's – just died as if all life and spirit just mysteriously departed. Patty went quiet. Now I understand what she means when she talks about going silent. Her face closed up, tight lips, eyes in a straight edge, sliding from side to side. It's obvious that she's thinking, noticing, but she's impenetrable. We took the bus home while Fred stayed with the car.

Patty and I trundled up the alley to the apartment, Russian peasants bundled in layers of clothing, the unfamiliarity of a neighbourhood plunged into swift sudden winter. No longer movement by habit or instinct. The familiar, the habitual, the routine have been erased. Dépanneur downstairs still sending out its fleet of bicycles laden with groceries and beer. Men in toques and Habs jerseys congregate. Tangled masses of rooftop wires coated with snow. I like imagining the wires are ham radio transmission wires and voices from countries can be heard in every building.

Sheet of silent white snow, our silhouettes gliding forward, dreamlike doubles. Children building a snow fort, colours of their snowsuits flowerlike intensity against the shimmering white plane. Red leather reclining chair in the alley, covered in a blanket of snow. A man is getting a haircut in a green-lit kitchen. Snow is vast, endless. No source, no cessation to big flakes whirling in the sky. People appear, disappear. I imagine wandering in circles to the point of exhaustion, the neighbourhood masked, concealed from me.

All the dinosaurs, the huge mechanisms for transporting snow in Montréal, have been deployed, little tow trucks sounding their alarms, sounding like circling dogs. A stand of fir trees adds to the Russian illusion. Snow lies deep, silence falls, we are in a midwinter village deep in the Russian interior, darkness giving everything covered by snow a starry lustre. Windows filled with crystal blossoms, blue light flowing down wooden floors. There is a glittering Japanese ocean on my kitchen window.

Such a contrast to the alley in summer where people flood out of apartments into postage stamp yards. Housekeeping utensils hang from balconies like potted plants. The street migrates into our living room. Here, interpenetration of day and night, noise and peace, outer light and inner darkness, street and home. One evening while walking through the alley after work a tiny woman dressed all in black admonished me in Italian (I think). A warning? A prophecy?

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*Link* party at Studebakers. Patty has the rare ability to circulate and divide her attention among many people without abandoning those who are closest to her. I was surprised and touched by how much attention from her in spite of the crowd. I don't know whether it was due to the events of the day, the long arduous bus and metro trips, the trek up the alley through the snow but I ended up in deep dark January mood.

Studebakers was an eerie period place with a sterile frozen-in-time ambience. Faded old Life and Look pictures on the wall, a Studebaker car, waitresses dressed in little drive-in outfits doing some sort of choreographed dance. Pale pink, blue neon, chrome lines creating a chilly echo-chamber. Or time capsule. Couldn't even tell exactly what time period Studebakers was recreating and it felt like stumbling into a time capsule full of indiscriminate objects and detritus from the 1950s and 60s. I did enjoy the party though. Everyone was excited about the results of the NDP convention where Audrey McLaughlin was elected.

Patty and I left for the Blue Angel where we met David McKnight and his wife Lily. Felt better there; warm, connected. Good company. Lily was intelligent and funny. David is working on his thesis, a bibliography of small presses in Canada. Gratified to hear that Patty had also found Studebakers weird and sterile.

## **Dec. 6**

Nightmare. A bitter alienated man walked into the École Polytechnique (engineering faculty at Université de Montréal), separated the men and women, killed fourteen young women in a classroom and wounded others before killing himself. He used a semi-automatic rifle. He was rejected by the engineering program. Apparently he had also been rejected by the army.

This sack of shit was influenced by the corporal who had gone on a shooting rampage at the National Assembly a couple of years ago. He went into the school with one purpose – to kill the feminists. A policeman sent into the building found his own daughter shot dead.

I couldn't sleep and woke up early hoping it had been a dream. No such luck. Some of the response has been touching and appropriate. My favourite radio morning show host was sad, subdued and treated it like the morning after a funeral.

Frightening number of people denying it's a feminist issue. They claim it was a random act perpetrated in isolation by a psychotic. The guy said he was going to kill the feminists. He did not walk into a McDonald's and open-fire. He selected his victims and he named them: feminists. Women. The people he blamed for the failures in his life. Ironically, the man himself (who I will not name) would be angry and the denial and burial of his anti-feminist crusade. He wanted the world to know why those women died. Pervasive everyday misogyny is the ground that sowed the seeds of this man's so-called madness. This is its ecology, what has to be examined.

The event occurred at five or so in the late afternoon. These young women were sitting in a classroom. What is it about violence and enclosed spaces? Abused children in orphanages, hospitals, etc. Violence committed against women and children in the family unit (nuclear family), the most charged, fraught psychotic enclosure ever created, which leads to greater societal violence. In this case, there is a direct connection between family and society. The murderer's father had been violent against women and had also blamed the feminists for his own failures to get ahead in society.

At what point did the son cease being an autonomous human being? At which point was the switch thrown? When did he start uttering his father's words in such an unthinking and programmed way? When did he quit the struggle to be a human being and revert to being a receptacle for his father's hate? Fred pointed out that the TV show about Colin Thatcher came out just before the École murders. That story also depicted a man obsessed with control and domination over a woman who was desperately trying to free herself. This hatred and contempt of women is a latent throughout all of human society and goes back at least to biblical times. It is the oldest hate of all.

That said, I was happy to see journalists such as James Quig and Jack Todd questioning the ways in which they themselves promote and condone violence toward women. I rarely even look at *The Gazette*, but for once, the newspaper showed some emotion rather than propping up an effete status quo.

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Other news this week: collapse of the Berlin Wall. Singing, dancing, celebration. Images of people chipping pieces off the wall as souvenirs. The Communist governments of Czechoslovakia and Hungary fell after Poland led the way. One minute these are all presented by the media as hard-line governments resistant to any reforms instigated by Gorbachev. The next we hear from the same media is that all these regimes have fallen, that they were actually unstable, and blah-de-blah-blah. Chalk it up the the Domino Theory of Communism. Truly exciting and historical! The crowd scenes, filtered by satellite transmission in pixilated blue light, look ghostly and as free-floating as the astronauts on the first moonwalk.

### **Dec. 7**

Not thrilled at having to work on the night after. Everyone at work shaken. Long talk with Cynthia and Meredith, but it was Gail who challenged me the most. She came to work dressed in black as I was, but she had gone to the memorial service. Said she made a fool of herself because she didn't agree with turning the service into a male violence against women issue. She cornered someone at the service because she had to tell her story about something that happened to her on the Metro. She was attacked by a couple of young women, one of whom had a knife. This was shortly after her divorce and her return to Montréal from California. She was frightened and had no sense of self-esteem at the time. The knife-wielding woman took her money and kept saying to Gail, "It's not enough, not enough." Gail had no money at that time, was living off her father.

She distrusts people who speak only about the violence men do and she confided that she and Ravil had a fight about her going to babysit her nephew Ross. This was the one time she had to be by herself, doing something peaceful that she loved. She hit Ravil. Ravil was patient and let her yell and cry because he knew she had a lot of emotion building up inside her, including all the feelings about how the doctors and nurses have been treating her beloved grandmother. She said she was the one who had hit Ravil, she was the one who had been violent and irrational and she felt like some sort of monster.

In turn, I confided about a night when Fred and I fought. I don't remember what it was about. Fred often wears me down with his irrefutable smug logic and keeps at me in an insistent drone. He won't let anything drop, won't give me space to walk away and think things through. This time I punched him in the jaw. He was stunned, almost in tears. I felt like a violent abusive monster and I thought of the way my mother had kept at my father, the way his shoulders would slump in defeat. I wonder if he reminded me of my mother, if that was why I struck out like that. Gail came over and embraced me, almost in tears. I have never met anyone with more empathy.

## **Dec. 8**

Called Marsha to wish her a happy birthday and ask about her holiday plans. We talked about the U de M tragedy and our conversation became contemplative, introspective. Some Queen's students had pulled tasteless pranks which upset her (of course). Like me, she worries about the conservatism of young people, the racism and antifeminism of the students, the reversion to traditional roles. She said the massacre has frozen all her feeling for Christmas.

Her New Testament Christian roots run deep, which is natural especially considering her mother's recent ordination into the ministry. Marsha wrestled with thoughts of revenge and judgment, as she often does and talked about the relationship between the killer and the rest of the community. She said it was good that he killed himself so she and other people wouldn't be filled with feelings of hatred and revenge for him. That we would all not be diminished as feeling human beings because of this unfeeling, unimaginative man's actions. For it is not right to repay hatred and violence with more hatred and violence, even if it is only in our hearts.

She was among those who had been stunned that this happened in Canada but we both agree that there isn't anything about Canadian culture that is intrinsically better, kinder, more compassionate or moral than the US. If it hasn't happened here before it's only because Canadians are more reserved and not because we're better.

### **Dec. 9**

Free tickets to a production of Molière's *Imaginary Invalid*, courtesy of Mary Rose and Morrie. A Concordia Drama School production and better than the National Theatre School's end-of the year production. Great props, setting costume. The play started while the audience was still milling in the lobby. Travelling minstrels, milkmaids, virginal schoolgirls in period costume mingled with the audience in their winter clothing. A real courtyard scene, reminiscent of what it must have looked like when the original play was staged.

Mary Rose got in the spirit of it and was good company. A wondrous sight when the procession of doctors descended down the escalator, clearing a path through the crowd, chanting in pseudo-Latin, medical jargon, all dressed in black with frightening collars and hats, brandishing staffs emblazoned with occult symbols. Truly marvelous. Death stood in the middle of the public square, covered in webs of cloth, face ashen grey. Michael Carley, who was in one of my writing workshops, played that role. After the performance he kissed me and said he was glad he had met me (!)

### **Dec. 13**

Gail and I walked up the hill to the Health Sciences Christmas party. She and Ravil don't go out much and this is a big event for her. She was dressed to the nines; cherry-red dress, glossy black hair. Gail is almost ten years older than I am and much more conservative, but she is a kindred spirit. She said she loves McGill because of all the different kinds of people she meets. She grew up in a very repressed, sheltered family and she never went away to school, so working at McGill has opened her up. I love her emotional integrity, her capacity to change her mind when something touches her heart. When Gail was in the hospital she met a young woman having an abortion. At first she was disgusted and thought of her as a slut. Then she talked with the girl and realized how poor she was. It changed Gail. She couldn't judge the girl any more. Her heart went out to this young woman. Gail said she could never feel abortion is wrong any more, or that anyone has the right to judge. She told me this story with tears in her eyes. Gail acts through her feelings, what she sees and feels, her senses. She changes through personal experience and relationships with people. It gives her depth and power.

This year's Health Services party was held at Frances Groen's condo's "party room." Not as much fun as last year and no pool room to duck into. It was an older, conservative group of librarians who dominated. Gail and I clung together, talking and eating with our usual gusto. We laughed at the way Fred was leaning over the bar, shmoozing with all and sundry. We also laughed at Ravil, surrounded by his harem. Fred and Ravil have a lot in common, including some unpleasant relatives, but they keep up a workplace mock-rivalry, which amuses Gail and me to no end. "Oh that devilish Tartar!"

#### **Dec. 14**

Our Howard Ross Christmas party. Reminded me how much I like most of my co-workers. Except Jodie Hebert. Sometimes Jane and Jodie, who are friends, work on each other and create a formidable bloc. Both Js are working through feelings of rejection caused by their divorces and they both feel they have a lot to prove. With all their talk about the symphony, the CBC and various writers, the conversations can sometimes be pretty arid and precious. Book Chat at Howard Ross Library. Gail and I joke about our jug and spoon band.

Cynthia and I sat together and joked about being the token casuals. We have a running joke about my Zionist friends conspiring to subvert Christmas. Meredith popped up, expectant and faithful, finding a home at Howard Ross. In spite of her poise and maturity, she sometimes has a "little girl lost" quality.

Gail and I laughed over the way Fred was chatting Jane up. Jane admitted to Gail that she is very lonely but tends to withdraw. Injustice depresses her too. She tries hard to do what's right and follow the rules – not like her twin sister who goes out with married men, but Jane isn't meeting any men. Gail said she was very lonely after her divorce, before Ravil but she needed love and affection so badly she went after it. Odette was her confidante.



## **Dec. 15**

Nursing/Social Work party. Talked with Odette and Steve Peets. Odette wondered how I managed to escape Jane to come to the party. Odette dislikes Jane intensely. She was a little drunk and made no attempt to conceal her feelings. She refers to Jane as “the General.”

Karen Gagnon was at both the Health Sciences and Nursing Social Work parties. At both parties she seemed remote and, for her, moody. But after the NSW party we joined her and Ken at their apartment for dinner. She was her friendly, relaxed self away from the parties. We’re such a good equal foursome, but tonight I had a good talk with Karen about work while Fred and Ken discussed Europe. Glad the connection between Karen and me strengthened. Nice evening of food, wine and videos. Ken confessed he had been “visiting Captain Morgan” earlier in the evening.

## **Dec. 16**

The social whirl continues. Two very different parties; one at Mary Rose’s and the other at Odette’s apartment. The highlight of MR’s party was seeing her new paintings, three large canvases, one of an eye, one of a nude woman and one of a powerful animus figure. I was especially interested in that one. MR confided the painting started out being of Chris but she had to change it because it resembled him too much. Her artwork does have a lot of power, especially sexuality-spirituality, her underlying life theme. Her Saturn relentlessly pulls her to earth but her Leo, Pluto-Venus and Scorpio pack a real sexual wallop. Her artwork was the intensity the party lacked. Back in the living room people made insipid conversation and toasted the holidays with herbal tea. We went on to Odette’s party.

McGill friends of Odette’s, familiar faces mingled with other friends and I found myself thinking “outside friends.” That is how much a bastion McGill is. Ailsa was everywhere. I finally met her husband. I’ve bought antique jewelry and some clothing from him, but it was the first time we met. Ailsa disappeared and I saw her curled up, in near fetal position, sleeping on the floor of an almost empty room. Incredible image of the other side of Ailsa you only occasionally glimpse. Later she admitted she had gone off and had a nap and that she often does this. “All I have to do at a party is make an appearance.” So much for the persona of non-stop party girl!

Interesting photo of Odette and her sisters posed in ballet outfits. Odette is standing to the left, almost cut off. Her hair is straight, almost the same style it is now. Her expression is sombre. Her life changes dramatically. She always looks chic, yet in some ways she stays the same. That old photo revealed her essence. She described the Rolling Stones concert and the crush she's had on Mick Jagger since she was twelve or so. She said she was, and still is, a real rock groupie, which seems a bit of a contrast to her gentle personality, but there's that whole dramatic, proud, even violent side to her nature.

Joe Swift and his wife Christina were there. I introduced myself to Christina and without further ado she took my arm and steered me over to Joe. She's warm and uninhibited and I liked her instantly. Joe seemed happy to see me. He was more animated than I had ever seen him in Copy Service. He mentioned my book and Christine said, "I remember that book! I'd be trying to sleep and Joe would be awake beside me, reading away, chuckling and nudging me so he could read me all the good parts." Then Joe said, "All that time in Copy Service Marc and I kept on talking about our manuscripts and here she was, just sitting there, not saying a word and in the meantime getting published. Did we ever feel like fools!"

Out again into the deep Christmas world of Westmount then the breath-taking Metropolitan. Unfortunately the snow doesn't completely cover up all the trucks and render them spellbound. We live in the centre of a transit network. Buses criss-cross from all directions. Although the alley is dark and silent, I can see the trucks passing on the Met. Our bedroom window overlooks the street and I half expect to see the Wonderful World of Transportation, cars, trucks, trains, planes breaking through the window.

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Saw Fritz Lang's *M*, 1931, made before he came to America. Peter Lorre played the child murderer. Fascinating to see Germany on the brink of Hitler. This Germany is an inferno, pocked with smoke-filled rooms of the police and underworld. A child, Elsie Beckmann is murdered. The film culminates in an amazing trial conducted by the underworld characters.

Obscene child's balloon, breakdown of the murderer. "You are all criminals by choice. I have to be one. I am haunted by voices ... ghosts ... the mothers ... the children. The only time they're quiet is when I'm ..." A look of momentary peace passes over his face, he curls his fingers, doubles up and falls to the floor. He is taken to his trial by law enforcers. Twelve judges file into the court, take their places at a huge desk but the mother of Elsie Beckmann has the last word: "Sentencing him will not bring my child back."

So much ambiguity. The children are not innocent in this world either. No one can possibly be innocent in this world. The film opens with a scene of children standing in a circle, seen at a great distance. The camera angle is so distant, impersonal, you can't help but feel it could be the eye of the murderer, calculating, surveying, measuring the scene from a vantage point. The children start chanting something dark, "The man comes to take you away ... you're out." Right from the first moment the children are connected to the murderer by their knowledge of him. You can't see this film without thinking of the shadow of Hitler, Nazi Germany, murder of a society, of a world. An anonymous murderer created by society, the collective.

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Listening to Rickie Lee Jones's *Flying Cowboys*. The geography of dreams. Bittersweet music and lyrics woven from hidden feelings and childlike wonder. The music on this album is like a warm breeze from the Arizona desert, restless, scouring, relentlessly stripping away the surface to reveal a molten core. I love the way Jones's voice slips into the beat of the music, pace set by the instruments rather than the Singer-Songwriter. Her voice slips into music that already exists, insinuates from the margins outside the grid.

## Dec. 31

New Year's Eve with Karen and Ken at our place. We looked at a calendar of old maps from the Huntingdon Library collection (one of my presents to Fred). Evocative old maps with sea monsters, land masses labelled with Latin, Spanish French names – or “Terra Incognita.” Marginal drawings of exotic and imaginary wild animals, “the Black Peoples of Africa and the Americas.” Marginal drawings and off-centre panels existed long before *Mad Magazine* or *Ram*. So interesting to see these concepts of America as wild and strange as “deepest darkest Africa.”

“World Map,” Claudius Ptolemy in *Cosmographia*, 1452. Earliest printed atlases in Europe were those of Ptolemy. Looks more like a diagram of human anatomy than a map. Rivers and lakes shaped like liver, kidneys. All the Winds personified. First printed representation of Greenland. Story of earth and heaven, exploration of all that was known, dreamed and imagined about the world and its creation.

*World Map*, Nicolaas Visscher, 1647-62. Intrigued by the map's resemblance to a movie poster. Richly coloured mythological scenes in the margins. Zeus in an eagle-drawn chariot, Poseidon and Demeter being offered the fruits of the earth. Mythological geography, physical presence of the underworld.

*Grooten Atlas*, Joan Blaeu, 1642-65. Galli, Belgi, Venetiani, Germani, Hungary, Bohemi, Poloni, Greci. All the countries lost in the world wars exist again in all their commercial importance. Cities lined up at the top: Amsterdam, Praga, Constantinopolis, Venetia, Roma, Paris, London, Toledo, Lisboa in all their configurations, river arteries cutting through them at various angles. Inside the map, sailing ships and Poseidon ride the waves, golden lions face off on the shores of Africa.

*Antarctica*, Henricus Hondius, 1647-62. The belief in a large southern continent persisted well into the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Tentative lines of an ice and mist-shrouded continent, “the most difficult to map on earth.” “Australis Terra Incognita” blankness forming map's centre – a compass point with geometrical lines fanning out, connecting the tops of known continents from the bottoms. Your eye is, for once, drawn to the lower sections of the land masses. New way of seeing the world from this unknown continent. Of course, those who believed were right. Panel drawings of naked figures with a penguin as guide!

“World Map,” Petrus Planicius in Jan Huygen van Lenschoten *Itinerario*, 1596. Sailing ships, fantastic animals, curlicues. Europa – mountains and what appears to be an army bearing red cross flags. Inserts of the astrological signs. Asia – collection of exotic animals. Africa – Black man with bow and arrow riding a lizard. Also a black elephant. Peruana – sloth in a tree, volcanoes, toucan, woman astride a jaguar, naked figures bent over a fire in a lean-to. Mexicana – a naked woman on an armadillo bearing bow and arrow.

“World Map,” Pieter Goos, from *De Zee Atlas*, 1666. Figurative grouping at bottom represents a gathering of the four seasons. Magnificent sun, top centre. Something neo-Platonic about the veils of clouds and rays descending down to the figures at the bottom of the map. Level by level illumination. Winds blowing spirit and logos. Creation.

*America*, John Overton, 1671. Taken from a map drawn by a Dutchman, Petrus Kaerius. Bottom and top of the map mix portraits of explorers and new world towns in little comic strip patterns. Inextricable link between explorer and town.

All four of us, Fred, Karen, Ken and I found something appropriate about spending the last evening of a decade poring over old maps. Karen and I started talking about depression and people’s reactions to it. I told her what Boot had said about my mother’s depression; “Mom is morbid and that everything would be okay if she would just snap out of it and get a life.” Boot is emotionally blocked like Dad and she doesn’t seem to have a compassionate bone in her body, but I honestly can’t claim I had any better understanding of it when I was young. I used to become depressed myself thinking of my mother’s life, the emptiness and waste. I was also terrified that I would become just like her. Now I realize it isn’t that simple.

Perhaps a debilitating and life-negating depression is something that is out of our control. Maybe it comes under the heading of Acts of God or Finger of Fate, seemingly random events that happen to people for no apparent reason. No one passes moral judgment on someone who has cancer, or someone who has been attacked in the street. No one has the right to pass moral judgment on real depression. I feel I have become more understanding and compassionate because I was able to separate myself from it. With my ego removed, I can see my mother as a human being who is suffering from an illness through no fault of her own. I can see it clearly, more compassionately, without being sucked into the vortex.

Karen is finding her younger sister Tara very frustrating. Tara seems to be doing some self-destructive things out of anger and rebellion. She showed up at their mother's house for dinner in bare feet. Karen was angry and felt like saying, "How dare you be so disrespectful? You're just trying to show off and make your point by hurting Mom."

Karen's older sister, a nurse who lives right across the hall from K&K, had a completely different reaction. She was able to look at Tara and say, "Bare feet? Neat! I used to go everywhere in barefeet myself." Karen thinks her sister's different reaction was due to her being older and more removed. Karen is too close to Tara in age to have that perspective. She also thinks Tara still holds a lot of anger toward their mother because she was an alcoholic when they were growing up. Karen said all this so lightly I almost held my breath. Then the mood broke, the gazelle retreated back into the woods, took on its protective colouring and I was amazed at having caught a glimpse of it. Karen said her Mom has recovered, remarried and is skilled enough at crafts to run a booth at the big shows. They are very close now.

Ken and I talked about our theses. I said I wanted to examine the language of self-censorship among Jews in small towns without community. Ken's interest was immediately piqued. He was full of ideas, suggestions of people I could interview. Karen's step-father is Jewish. Ken's mother has been married three times. She is Jewish but she changed her name and buried it. She married a man named Feinstein and had him change his name to Fenton as a marriage condition.

At midnight the four of us cracked open a bottle of champagne. We shook the bottle and watched it spray to the ceiling. We stood in a circle, embraced, toasted the new year and decade. I mentioned how much I wanted to see Prague and Ken said we should go as soon as possible while the political situation has opened and not yet hardened into another regime. For some reason the Metro was running on a normal Sunday schedule and they stayed overnight.